

LUCIUS SHEPARD INTERVIEW

RICHARD A. LUPOFF, JOHN SHIRLEY, BRUCE STERLING, RUDY RUCKER, PAUL DI FILIPPO, STEPHEN P. BROWN, DAN STEFFAN & MORE.

SCIENCE FICTION eye

300 CENTS
600 YEN



**SPECIAL
PHILIP K
DICK
SECTION**



Jun Suemi

VOLUME 1
NUMBER 2



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SPECIAL THANKS:

Doug Fratz, Richard Thompson, Paul Williams, J.K. Potter, all the folks at *American Politics*, Chronicle Type & Design and Bookmakers, Inc.

EXTRA-SPECIAL THANKS:

To Joann Klappauf and the Common Ground Book Company, without whose continuing support and technology, the EYE would never have existed.

SCIENCE FICTION EYE is published three times a year by the 'Til You Go Blind Cooperative. Science Fiction EYE, Box 3105, Washington, DC, 20010-0105. All submissions and subscriptions are to be sent to the above address. Subscription rate: three issues (one year) \$7 USA and \$12 overseas. Two years: \$15 USA and \$22 overseas. Telephones: 202-745-2693 (Dan Steffan) and 301-946-2106 (Steve Brown). Copyright © 1987, Science Fiction EYE. All other rights assigned to contributors.

CONTENTS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

AUGUST 1987

1 RAPID EYE MOVEMENT:

Reactions and the seeds of controversy are beginning to flow in.

2 EYEDITORIALS:

In which your editors sound off and shamelessly hype what you are about to read.

5 EYE TO EYE WITH LUCIUS SHEPARD:

Truck-driver Rafael Sa'adah pins down SF's fastest-rising star for his first lengthy interview.

35 JERRY'S NEIGHBORS: A Report from Lynchburg, Va.

by Rudy Rucker

Calculapunk Rucker gives us a glimpse into life in Jerry Falwell's home town. Rudy vs. the God-pigs.

39 THE PHILIP K. DICK SECTION:

INTRODUCTION TO FAWN, LOOK BACK by Paul Williams:
Williams sets the *Fawn* outline into perspective, and places it into the chronology of PKD's output.

FAWN, LOOK BACK:

An unpublished novel outline by the master of SF paranoia.

RICHARD LUPOFF INTERVIEWS PKD:

An unpublished interview, in which Dick discusses the beginnings of his career, and digresses into other oddities (this should set collectors hunting for paperback copies of *Roots*).

ONLY APPARENTLY... by Ted White:

The acerbic White reviews Williams' study of PKD (based on his own long association with both author and subject), giving the EYE staff a chance to bite the hand that feeds them.

56 SCIENCE FICTION ALTERNATIVES, Part One:

Stelarc and the New Reality: by John Shirley

Novelist Shirley begins a three-part series exploring the various areas of real life that can give the SF reader the same kick as a good novel. This installment introduces us to Stelarc, a performance artist pushing the limits of technology.

62 CATSCAN: The Spearhead of Cognition: by Bruce Sterling

In the second installment of his column, Bruce explores the frigid fiction of Stanislaw Lem.

65 EYETRACKS:

Featuring "The 10 Greatest SF Novels" by Paul di Filippo, "The Response to the Humanist Manifesto" by Rob Hardin, and a host of reviews by the editors and others.

LEWIS SHINER
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I just learned that Charles Platt, in an act of irresponsibility (or outright malice) that staggers my imagination, printed an attack on SF EYE and John Kessel attributed to "Sue Denim." It has been common knowledge for some time that I am the author of the Sue Denim pieces that have appeared in *Cheap Truth*, SF EYE, and *Short Form*. (The last of those pieces, "SF and Teen Suicide," was written in March and is scheduled for *Short Form* #2.)

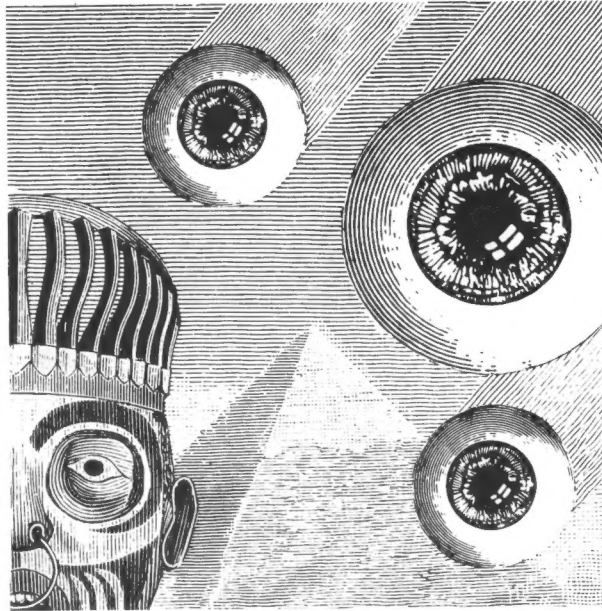
Platt claims the piece arrived without return address. He made no attempt to contact me to verify it, though he says he didn't think it was my work. He didn't even send me a copy. I only learned about it when I got a justifiably angry letter from John Kessel.

I claim a certain amount of responsibility. By using a pseudonym I left myself open for someone to take this kind of advantage. I had my own reasons for continuing to use the pseudonym, even though the targets of my pieces all knew (or could easily find out) who I was. I felt that Sue's persona allowed me to detach myself, and my own work, from the issues I was dealing with.

Well, no more. Sue Denim is dead. Charles Platt, and whoever wrote the attack on Kessel (if it wasn't Platt himself) have killed her. I will not use the name again. I don't apologize for the things I have said as Sue Denim. I do apologize to John for my inadvertent part in this shameful and infuriating business.

Those of you on the mailing list for Platt's REM (Charles Platt, Room 1208, 594 Broadway, New York, NY, 10012—\$1.50 per copy) already know far too much about this. For those of you who have not seen it: REM #8 had a piece that was intensely critical of the first issue of this magazine. This piece, "A Poke in the Eye" by "Sue Denim," was characterized by poor writing, filled with self-contradiction, non sequitur, lack of humor, some fairly ugly racism, and a flat turgidity of style. Lew Shiner's Sue Denim pieces, on the other hand, have always been witty, often cutting, and written with flair and brio. As it stood, the piece was laughably stupid to the duller of readers. If it was indeed written by an anonymous third party, it is a grotesque lapse in editorial ethics for Platt to have run the piece without verifying its authorship, and an equally grotesque lapse in editorial taste to have run it at all.

RAPID EYE MOVEMENT



Letters of Comment

MICHAEL SWANWICK
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Recent reviews of *Vacuum Flowers* in *Thrust* and SF EYE claim that I misapplied the term "wetware." This is a serious charge, since the concept is important to my novel, and I want to spike the notion before it spreads.

I don't have the book where I originally found the word, so I called the AI labs at MIT. They defined wetware as "neural nets or structures which participate in the processing of information in an organism." Which is how I used it. Wetware is not simply the protoplasmic equivalent of hardware, though it's often used that way.

I am not sure what the reviewers thought it meant. One hinted—but this may have been meant as a joke—that it had something to do with biochips. I suppose it's possible they've picked up the word for their own purposes. I wouldn't know. That's not what I was writing about.

LEWIS SHINER (for Sue Denim)

In my review of *Vacuum Flowers*, I accused Michael Swanwick of not knowing the meaning of "wetware." I was apparently mistaken, in that he is now at least able

to parrot a definition of the term.

No understanding of that term is conveyed, however, in the novel or in the above letter. When people use "wetware" in the novel, they are simply reprogramming themselves, i.e., replacing one set of software with another. I saw no exchange of "neural nets or structures" taking place. The personalities supposedly contained in these pieces of "wetware" are not dependent on neuronal structures in any case. They are information. Information is software.

I fail to see how Swanwick's current definition of wetware differs at all from "the protoplasmic equivalent of hardware." To paraphrase his own MIT definition, it is an organic system for processing information. Something you might use a neologism like "biochip" to describe. (Of course wetware—real wetware—has "something to do with biochips.") Whatever distinction Swanwick is reaching for here, he's going to have to do a hell of a lot better job of explaining it.

In the meantime, I'll just stand by what I said. "It's just plain old software, sort of like those Atari cartridges they used to have, only they can program your head with them." And Atari cartridges are software.

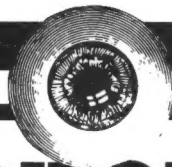
Sue/Lew is quite right. However, it is also true that the scientific usage of the term "wetware" is still in its formative stages. It has yet to pass from casual lab use into actual jargon. Like its meaning, its definition is still fluid. Regardless, (and I [spb] am the author of the other review Swanwick mentions—the one in *Thrust*) Swanwick did not use the term to refer to anything more complex than simple software. The "neural net" definition seems to offer some fascinating possibilities. Perhaps Rudy Rucker's forthcoming novel, *Wetware*, will clarify matters somewhat, or obscure them further.

EILEEN GUNN
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I rate your first issue PG (violence, mature subject matter, some naked ambition.) Fifteen dead bodies, including T.S. Eliot's. Three breasts. Cyberpunk—fu, ideology—fu, Ted—White—fu. The kneecapping of virtually every reactionary active in the field today. Major carnage—even some of the attack force incurred injury due to careless handling of incendiary materials.

I enjoyed it immensely. That issue

(continued on page 3)



EYEDITORIALS

TODAY'S SERMON
By Dan Steffan

One of the things that has always attracted me to modern science fiction is the visions of our future that it presents.

Visualizing the future is what science fiction is, was and always will be about. It is that extrapolation that originally attracted me to the genre. As an introverted child, I spent many happy hours exploring the inside of my head—learning to flesh out all the worlds and people I encountered there—and science fiction allowed me to explore the imaginary scenery other dreamers had put on paper. The input was exhilarating.

The same is true today. I live in a world of input. I try to go through life with my eyes wide open; hoping to catch a glimpse of something or somebody that will further contribute to my experience. Some would call me voyeuristic—I prefer to simply think of it as being open to the world around me.

Riding on the subway, I encounter two types of people: those who are afraid to look up from their feet or their newspaper, and others, like myself, who are constantly perusing the length of the car, checking out the platforms as they speed by and, generally, intimidating those who are hiding behind this week's *People* Magazine.

I don't understand the other point of view. I don't understand people who are afraid of information or experience. How can they know what is going on around them, or, for that matter, around the world, if they don't open their eyes?

A perfect example is the recent Iran-Contra hearings. I haven't been able to get enough of them. When I'm working or at home, I always have the TV tuned to our local PBS channel. In the car it is tuned to our local Pacifica station. A couple of mornings each week is spent reading transcripts. This has nothing to do with my work for a political publication, it is just another opportunity to learn more about something I'd not ordinarily be privy to.

But, at the same time, I encounter people every day who don't want to know the facts. They go through their lives with preset notions of how the world works and who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. White hats and black hats. They don't listen to the hearings and, if they happen to tune it in accidentally while looking for *Days of Our Lives*, they learn nothing. They prefer to take somebody



By Brown & Steffan

else's word about what is going on instead of making their own decision. The only passion they can muster is the anger they feel at having to miss out on just who fucked who on their favorite soap opera.

If your eyes are open to life's passing parade, there is always something to do, something to learn. In fact, around my house it isn't unusual to have a kind of sensory overload taking place most of the time. Music, TV, books, magazines and conversation are always being sampled and tasted—often all at the same time. It is this exposure, this access to too much information, that keeps me coming back to my favorite science fiction writers.

I now look for different things in the fiction than I did at age twelve, but it is still that same attraction to information about our future that keeps me coming back for more. That is why I have always been so passionate about the works of Philip K. Dick, Frederik Pohl, and now, William Gibson. They offer educated guesses and expansive ideas about the future. I know that they have their eyes wide open to our present, even if I don't agree with their conclusions.

Conversely, I have no use for SF writers who merely regurgitate the ideas they've ingested from others—copy-cat authors, if you will—who think that if an idea or worldview has been successful for somebody else, then it is good enough for them. It isn't even a matter of matching their outlook with some other writers and

exploring similar ground and ideas. They don't have time for their own ideas or opinions as long as the surface is intact and looks a lot like the surface of somebody successful.

That turns my stomach. That makes me want to puke. That makes me want to stand on top of my little soapbox and slap them around until they wake up and smell the pollution. But, of course, it does no good. Those who need to listen the most are those who resist it the hardest. I shake my fist at them from time to time, but I don't waste my breath on the unconvinced anymore. Instead I stand here before you and preach to the already converted. It is frustrating, all right, but it beats slamming your head against the wall.

Unfortunately, ol' Ollie North feels exactly the same way.

TERRY CARR

The death of Terry Carr saddened the entire SF community. I met Terry in 1971. I was an awkward, pimple-faced kid with barely enough sense to come in out of the rain, but Terry's friendship was unconditional.

That relationship remained intact for the next fifteen years. His advice and input concerning *SF EYE* in the last year of his life was as good and honest as the man himself. I don't know how I was lucky enough to gain Terry's ear, but I do know I will miss it and him. ●

LUMPS FOUND FLOATING
IN A BOWL OF EYESTEWS
by Stephen P. Brown

Okay, so we're three months late. We think the results are worth it. A great deal of time was spent in acquiring a decent typeface, rectifying the most glaring design flaw in our first issue. More time was spent in...but you don't want to hear all this. Suffice to say that we wanted to make it right, not make it quick. We're learning as we go, and each issue will get better. Why, I figure that by the time issue #6 comes around, it will be so good that you will be able to see the glow in your mailbox as you trudge up the driveway.

But this issue ain't bad.

We lead off with a strong and remarkably candid interview with Lucius Shepard. Lucius has exploded on the SF world with a flurry of brilliantly crafted short stories in the past few years. His first novel, *Green Eyes*, was the second of

the Terry Carr Ace Specials, tucked between Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. After *Green Eyes*, Shepard began filling the magazines with short stories that extended the standards of craft, most of which have been collected in the Arkham House *Jaguar Hunter* collection. On the eve of publication of his second novel, *Life During Wartime*, Lucius took time out from blazing new literary trails, leaned on his machete, flicked a bead of sweat from his furrowed brow, and talked at some length to EYE interviewer Rafael Sa'adah.

Rafael brings a fresh viewpoint to the SF personality interview game. He is an admirer of contemporary fiction of all sorts, including the few bits of very good modern science fiction being published. Yet he is untainted by prolonged exposure to the pathologically inbred SF community. Thus he was able to leave industry gossip and community news behind and concentrate on the writer and his work. Though he spends most of his time mesmerized by the asphalt unrolling beneath his wheels, it is hoped that Sa'adah can be talked into parking his rig and dabbling in future EYE projects.

In this issue we begin a three-part series of essays by John Shirley designed to point out that the brainbursts that encountering great SF ideas can provide are also found in real life. Yes, fellow prose ingesters, the best ideas are real. The weirdest ideas are real. Taking off from a portrait of the extraordinary Stelarc, Shirley lashes us into pulling our noses out of our books and looking around at the fermenting yeast of modern technology spinning out of control. Shirley has been probing at the sore spots of SF for years, both in his many novels, and in his fearless and abrasive commentary. But don't worry, these articles don't mean that John has become exasperated with fiction. By this time next year there will be a whole slew of new Shirley books. Warner will be bringing out his *Eclipse* trilogy, a pivotal work caught temporarily in the death-throes of Bluejay; Franklin Watts will be publishing, in hardback, his vivid and surreal *A Splendid Chaos* (look for an excerpt in EYE #3), and he has even had time to write a horror novel for Signet.

Another odd toiler in the SF vineyards, Rudy Rucker, has given us an essay on the peculiar nature of living in Lynchburg, Virginia: a town whose major industry is Jerry Falwell. Rudy's innumerable books have created their own niche in SF. No one writes like him. Cross Donald Duck with Martin Gardner, soak the result overnight in a psilocybin broth, and blast it from the nozzle of a firehose. Rudy's calmed down a little for this article, but his unique viewpoint shines through. When he isn't writing books like *The Sex Sphere*, Professor Rucker emits books on popular

mathematics like the recent *Mind Tools*. Most recently he has edited a assortment of mathematically-based SF stories into the superb *Mathenauts* collection.

Paul Williams and Richard Lupoff have supplied us with a wealth of fine new Philip K. Dick material; respectively an unpublished novel outline (with explanatory article by Paul) and a previously unpublished interview that concentrates, for the most part, on the beginning of Dick's career in the early fifties.

Ace EYE columnist Bruce Sterling has managed to squeeze out a few moments between bouts of tiny toe manipulation and night-feeding to contribute another installment of his CATSCAN column. This one illuminates the work of Stanislaw Lem, the brilliant Polish writer who may well be the first to create Sterling's own stated goal: a novel without verbs.

Our potpourri EYETRACKS section has a lot of interesting reviews and short opinion pieces (like Paul DiFilippo's lecture on what good literature really is), but I must call your attention to New York studio musician Rob Hardin's erudite dissection of last issue's Humanist Manifesto by John Kessel. I think you'll find that Hardin's article goes beyond merely refuting Kessel, and sheds some interesting new light on the work of William Gibson.

A special mention must be made of this month's cover. It is by a talented young Japanese artist. Jun Suemi was called to our attention by our esteemed contributing editor, Takayuki Tatsumi. His cover, and the interior work, mark Suemi's first American publication.

This issue inaugurates a letter column, now that we have letters to print. Complaints, character assassinations, brickbats and bits of outright self-puffery are encouraged. Did we do something to cheese you off? Tell us about it. You mean we didn't? Then I guess we aren't doing our job right. Well, we'll have to try a little harder.

Next issue we will tackle our biggest project yet. This will be our fiction issue, done in a giant 10 x 14 format. We will have unpublished fiction by Richard Lupoff, Paul di Filippo, Charles Sheffield, John Shirley, and yet more. We will also be running a short but succinct interview with Samuel R. Delany, in which he discusses the opinions he's honed from teaching C-pnk fiction at Cornell for a year.

And that ain't all! Bruce Sterling's column will continue to forge ever-sharpening stilettos of criticism; a superb cover by J.K. Potter; and tons of stuff we haven't even thought of yet! So if you haven't sent in your measely seven bucks, better do it now before it's all gone.

Stay tuned for the editorial pages of our next issue, when my colleague Dan will tell you all about it, and it will be my turn to mount the soapbox and sound off. ●

LETTERS

(continued from page 1)

alone was worth the cost of the entire year's subscription. Would you like another seven bucks?

One question: What the hell is Sterling gazing at so affectionately in the picture on page 28? It appears to be a hash pipe made of shuriken.

The artifact in question is in fact an exact replica of a portion of William Gibson's brain. Mr Sterling reported to us that the item is made entirely of acrylic byproducts, and has a delightful pine scent.

ELISABETH VONARBURG

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CANADA

My writing English may not be at par with my understanding English, but what the Kronk, alienness is what it's all about, so you try to read through my quaint un-white speech ("Speak White" was what Anglo-Canadians sometimes said to Quebecers in the not so old times, 15 years ago...)

I read that first issue cover to cover with high hopes, which were not quite disappointed, and high interest, which was kept alive until the last page. That's a plus, and I am very happy I subscribed to SF EYE if it goes on like this. But. All along, I was feeling some sort of creeping unease, and I have pinpointed its source by now: it is the pervasive unspoken *insularity* of the whole CBPK debate. Not only the "in" circle is very narrow, but the very worldview underlining the CBPK "movement" exhibits a sort of tunnel vision. The only culture extensively mentioned is the Japanese one. (Except for the—slightly paternalistic—Sterling's piece on Verne; what about *modern* French SF one day, guys?) OK, I am as fascinated by Japan as Bruce Sterling is, but I could not help but thinking that this (usual) American view of the world was (as usual) somewhat lopsided. Do you intend to go on like this, or will you be sympathetic to other voices, other shores? I don't feel entitled to speak up for any other culture than mine, the francophone one, but I certainly want to speak up for it. So here goes:

Hey guys, there's a lot of us SF fans and writers out there, who are reading you and read your SF ancestors, but who do write the stuff too, and work very hard at it, and think about it a lot, and maybe we of European-non-English culture might have something interesting to say about this whole ongoing controversy about CBPK, and Movement(s) (with Chairman...), and Literature & Science & fusion of same & Social Awareness in SF.

You know, from where I stand, this whole debate seems almost funny, sooo American! As if nobody else has ever asked those questions, or tackled those issues... It sounds so adolescently self-

important, We Are The Universe, Everything Else Revolves Around Us/US...

Mind you, this is not a US-bashing letter! Living in Quebec, I am perfectly aware that I live in North America and I like it and I wanted it; even if I was born and raised in France and lived there up to my mid-twenties, formative years and all, I choose to live in Quebec, which does say something—for me, at least. And I read fluently in English, and I love the language, and I am ecstatic that I found a wonderful translator to work with me on my own fiction... All of which sometimes causes me some trouble with my francophone SF friends in the very francophone province of Quebec...

I first experienced SF in Europe, and more specifically in France, in the 60s and 70s (OK: I am forty), and I witnessed (about 15 years ago), participated (same) and am now instrumental in, the birth and continuing life of SF in Quebec, while watching the Anglo-Canadian SF struggling to be born. For almost 10 years, I have been literary editor of a Quebecer SF & F magazine, (*Solaris*), for 28 years, I have been writing SF, and for 9 years, I have been published, in Quebec and in France; I am even beginning to get translated in Anglo-Canada, golly, here comes the big time, folks—or does it?

(All this to define the "where I stand").

What has all this to do with SF EYE #1? Well, we in Quebec have been debating (hotly) about some of the exact same subjects Gibson and Shirley and Sterling and Kessel tackle in that issue, and I know that a lot of French fans are in on it too. In what are our debates different from yours? Well, we look at it from a different point of view, see: we (in Quebec) are not members of one of the leading technological societies, we (in Europe) have centuries of History to contend with (and what a weight that can be, you have perhaps no idea!)... You might say: "But England, for instance, is not exactly at the cutting edge of technology either." Yes, but they speak English—which puts them in the same linguistic/cultural bandwidth as you, even if they might not be as unthinkingly cocky now as some Americans can be about their innate superiority. (I know from my dealings and talks with some English SF writers, that they do suffer a kind of ostracism from the American SF market; so just think about what our complaints might be!)

At this point, some will say that we, francophones, and francophones in Quebec, are blinded by our situation: we're in a social-evolutionary dead-end, relics of the past, and we don't see, can't see, the Big Picture. To which I would answer that the very concept of a Big Picture is at least debatable; and also that we might just see, let's say "the modern world" from another angle which might be as relevant as the unspoken (and maybe even the unconscious) Americanoid assumptions of Sterling, Shirley et al. about technology & its impact on society...

It seems to me that the way we relate individually to technology is different according to the society we live in/are from, right? Europeans, and francophones (and some third-worlders...) are much more skeptical and wary—I am not talking about technophobia here, though—because they feel technology is somehow...perpetrated upon them: they are not really the ones who do it anymore, they're not on the (in)famous "cutting edge" of it.

"Cutting edge:" this metaphor is quite revealing, by the way. Oh yes, there is that pervasive *maleness* in the interviews and articles... Or is the "maleness" somehow specific to (of) CBPK? So much aggressivity, so much *posturing* and jockeying for position... Gibson, at least, acknowledges having "accessed the fucked-up adolescent" in himself while writing *Neuromancer*... But Shirley... Or Sterling... Did they pause to consider the possibility of a (adolescent) male bias in what they say/write, and hence in the way they define CBPK?

You know, as a woman who reads and writes SF, I can tell you this is one of the most pervasive and ineradicable assumptions in it, the adolescent male point of view... It can be very interesting, though, when we (You and Us) talk about it, and try to define its nature, and its relation to a "female" (adolescent or not...) point of view (I quote—unquote because I am still not quite sure what it is; as J. Merrill said of SF: "when I see it, I know it...")...

But it seems to me, reading Sterling's or Shirley's comments, that there is not much space left for anything else than themselves (and their friends, or partisans) in their CBPK definitions. Benford's remark about his mistrust of reductionism, or conversely Brin's contention that CBPKs tend to exclude, condemn and reject those who don't think/write like they do, both ring quite true to me after reading this issue of SF EYE, especially the SFRA panel...

A more or less disdainful dismissal of the Other, that is not what SF is all about for me—modern SF, at least; sounds more like bad SF of the "golden age," folks. Better clear your act...

I must add that I always defend CBPKs against their rabid opponents, because I like what they do and how they do it, most of the time (especially Gibson and Sterling), and also on the same ground(s) (acceptance of the Other), which Kessel patrols with the so-called Humanists or BOFFOs (God, how I hate those so conveniently misleading labels!).

But to me, a "middle ground" doesn't have to be a wimpy avoiding of any confrontation—"we're all a little of this, and a little of that, come on my grey brothers/sisters, let's all be lukewarm together." Differences have to be cherished, not abolished, and I for one do relish a spirited argument—SF EYE #1 provides a lot of fuel for that! I just don't want some claiming or believing (what they see as) their difference makes them better than the others... Specially when they don't even

seem to realize fully how many differences there can be. And specially in the SF field which thrives on that kind of (adolescent-exile-outsider) thinking/emoting.

We would agree with you whole-heartedly, Elisabeth, if only you weren't from another country, spoke another language, and a woman. It's too bad, really, because you make some interesting points.

ALEXIS A. GILLILAND
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Your first issue has a very professional look with a lot of interesting material, and may even be a little intimidating to prospective letter writers. The art and layout reflect the fine hand of Dan Steffan. A bit of his own artwork would not be at all out of place, here, and he should put some in.

We have a really extended presentation of the cyberpunk movement, with interviews and panels, so that the reader can see what all it is that is being hyped. William Gibson, for instance, can hardly bring himself to utter the word that names the movement, which as Maddox says on page 15, "...has nothing to do with science fiction, it has to do with Bruce's charismatic leadership qualities."

And on page 52 we have John Kessel discussing *Cheap Truth*, the fanzine Bruce Sterling put out under the pseudonym of Vincent Omniaveritas.

A couple of comments, nit picks really, about Bruce Sterling. Bruce is a very fluent talker, articulate, knowledgeable, and coherent. The first nit is where he says "I get *Science* magazine every month." *Science* is a weekly, the tiniest error of fact. The second nit is his tendency to confuse rhetoric with reality, as manifested on page 35 where he says: "There has never been a society on the face of the planet where a large proportion of the citizenry went around and really altered their states of consciousness." America has had an extensive history of alcohol and substance abuse, cocaine having been a major and legal ingredient of all sorts of patent medicines sold after the Civil War, while in 1868 we imported 146,000 pounds of opium. Eventually this led to the Narcotics Drug Act of 1909, and O'Neil's "Long Day's Journey Into Night" is anecdotal support for the contemporary abuse of both drugs (his mother) and alcohol (his brother.)

Nor are we the only ones. Winston Churchill described the traditions of the British Navy as "Rum, sodomy, and the lash." After the Napoleonic Wars, the standard issue was a half pint of Jamaican rum per day per man, anesthesia being a far cheaper expedient than providing tolerable food and working conditions. (The Soviet Union today is using alcohol in exactly the same fashion to anesthetize the whole society.) Drunkenness in the ranks was a major problem in the British Army as

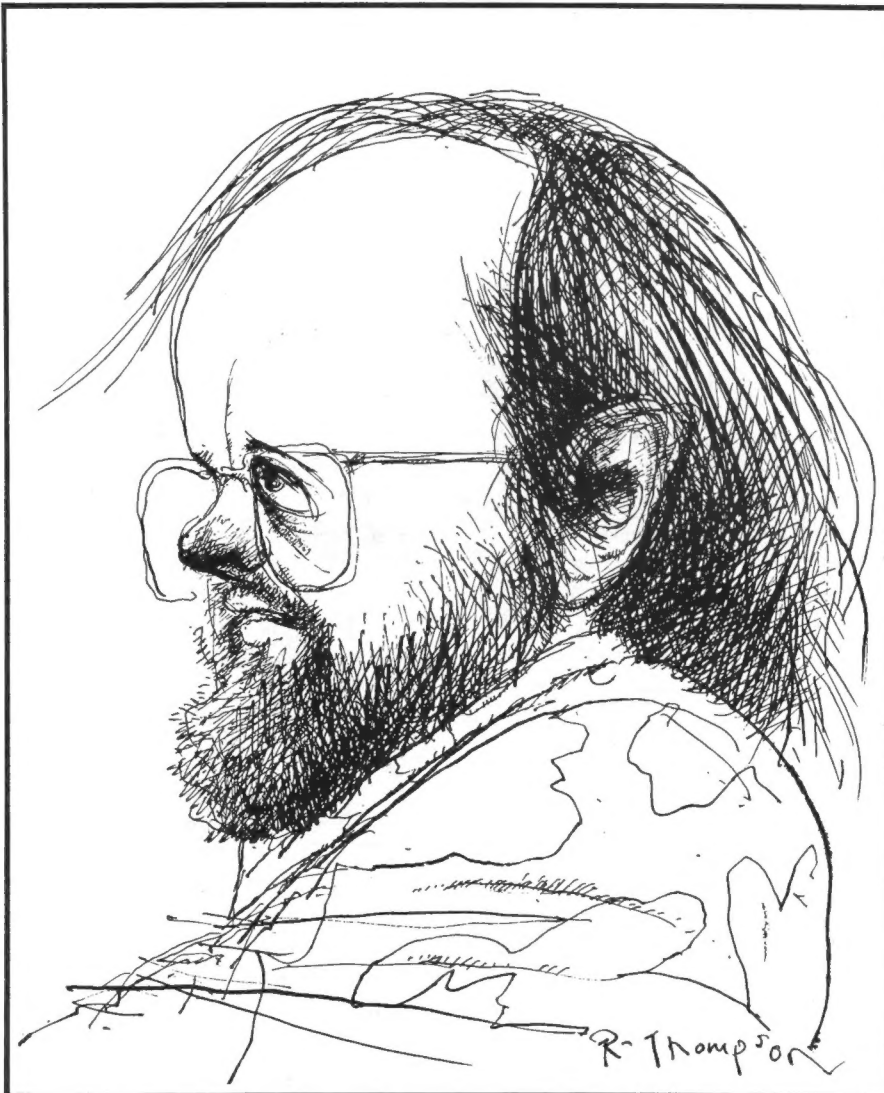
(continued on page 69)

eyeTOeye

An Interview With

LUCIUS SHEPARD

By Rafael Sa'adah



SA'ADAH: *As a reader of your work, one of the things that has been frustrating to me has been the lack of background information on you that I've been able to dig up. A couple of paragraphs here, a couple of paragraphs there. But basically you're a mysterious figure. Just to start off, maybe we could talk about a little biographical information.*

SHEPARD: Sure. I was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, which is Jerry Falwell's home base. All my family's from Virginia. All my relatives live there. I hate them all. They're all First Family Virginia types, aristocrats. They all know their family tree back to 1400, like who really won the Civil War, and all that shit. I moved away from there when I was real young, eight. But I kept going back there to visit my relatives.

I grew up in Florida, Daytona Beach, which is one hell of a town, no sense of place. February they bring in the red necks for the stock car races, then come the bikers, then come the college kids, then come the red necks again. And then the old people come. It's like growing up on a Hollywood set. You don't have a sense of it being your town because it's everybody else's town first. I graduated from Seabreeze High School, the Seabreeze Sand Crabs. I used to get a lot of shit about that. So then I went to the University of North Carolina for about six weeks. I wasn't doin' real well. I basically just got really stoned in class. I mean so wiped out that they'd call my name and...out the window.

SA'ADAH: *Was this the first time you'd been away from home?*

SHEPARD: Not really. I'd done a lot of traveling with my parents, and some without. My mother was a Spanish teacher so we used to go down to Mexico and a lot of Latin American countries. A couple of

Richard Thompson

times I went with older kids.

But college... I talked to my advisor, and he says: "What do you want to be?" And I said well I figure I want to be a writer, and he said: "Well, what the hell are you doing here?" I didn't start writing right then. I tried, I was writing poetry, I was having some stuff published and doing all right but...

SA'ADAH: *Was this in academic journals, poetry journals?*

SHEPARD: Yeah, I published a lot of stuff. I came back about two and a half years later and edited the *Carolina Quarterly*. I was there for a few months and bopped out again. I published there, and I published in *Lilabulero*, which was Russ Banks' magazine. Russ, he's a novelist. His last book was *Continental Drift*, which was up for the Pulitzer. He's a good friend. He lives in Brooklyn. Just like that, it was the only place to do poetry.

SA'ADAH: *What time-frame are we talking about here?*

SHEPARD: We're talking about the late Sixties. So anyway, I went to New York City after I dropped out and I got a job in a book depository, worked for a while, saved a little money, then I split and went to Europe. I got pneumonia in England, so I had to get the hell out of England as soon as I got well. I ended up in Spain and I had about twenty-five dollars. At one point, in Spain, I was amok, I was trying to kill squirrels with rocks in the park. It was really dumb. So I hustled. I met these old ladies who couldn't talk Spanish, and helped them buy shoes and crap like that.

Then I went down to Torremolinos which was a big jet set place back in those days. The Duke of Bedford and all these people would hang out in this place called Pablo's which was run by these two ivy league college guys who had just gotten out of Dartmouth, or someplace like that.

What I would do is buy construction paper and make these collages out of lottery tickets, turn around and sell them and they would give me five bucks. They thought I was real cute.

I taught English for a while in this really bizarre school, called the American High School which was basically a haven for dope addicts, as far as the teachers go.

SA'ADAH: *Still in Spain?*

SHEPARD: Yes. I was living in a little village called Pedregalejo. I wrote about this in a story called "A Spanish Lesson." It was really funny. Everyone there was on serious drugs. I had a class with Arabs, Germans, Americans, Spanish--just all kinds of things. So I was trying to teach a little language. I would go in there and draw a picture of a bird on the blackboard and say "bird." That was about it.

SA'ADAH: *Winging it.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, sort of vague out for a while.

So after that I met these two guys, a black guy and a Jewish guy and we started a small smuggling thing. We'd go down to Morocco, to Tangier, and buy Kif and just pack this little Volvo with it, take the ferry back and drive up into the Common Market countries to Copenhagen and to London, mostly to Copenhagen.

We had some bad times in London, it was really hard to get rid of any quantity. It was kind of amusing. The first people we dealt with were these two black guys from Brighton named Tweedy, the Tweedy brothers. They didn't buy very much, but it was an amusing experience. They looked like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, black version. They drove a big Rolls Royce with a chauffeur and they came all the way down to buy two kilos of the stuff--very polite and very weird.

Finally I met these two guys who were like Fagens, Cockney guys named Roger and Arthur. They ran this gang of shoplifters. If you wanted something, like if you'd see them walking down the street and say, "That's a nice coat." Some little tyke would run in there and take it for you.

It was just a lot of hassles, we dribbled and drabbed it away, and we ended up spending a lot of money. So thereafter we went to Copenhagen where there were a lot of musicians and you could pretty much dump it all. If we ran out of money on the way up, we would sell it in the Army bases in Germany, which was perilous.

SA'ADAH: *Were you aware of any risk at the time, or was this more of an adventure?*

SHEPARD: I was pretty young, and you don't get too involved with security at that time in your life. But it was less dangerous than it would be now. The borders were not as strict. The Army stuff, that was just foolishness. It was like, hey, let's go hang out with the black guys. It was basically idiocy. There were two things that happened bad.

Once our car broke down in this little village in Spain and this guy said he'd charge us so much, and then upped it about twenty thousand dollars. It was ridiculous. The guy with me got really irritated. He was screaming at this guy, so along comes one of the Guardia Civilas with a submachinegun. That was scary.

The other time that was bad was near Wiesbaden. Our car lost a muffler and was making a really vile noise. We saw one of these German people behind us, writing down our license number. So, oh shit, we haul off the road. We found this wood with a little clearing near a village called Ehrenbach. So we dug a hole, and we didn't dig it big enough. We buried forty-two kilos

in one, and eight in another, we had to dig a second hole. Then we went into Wiesbaden. We had kept out a little dope and sold it to pay for the muffler. When we came back, there was a troupe of German boy scouts camped over our dope. This was real paranoia.

Here I was, like seventeen or eighteen, and these guys were ten years older than me. And they were coming up to me saying stuff like, "Lucius, I think Don's sluffing out, you gotta watch it." And then the other guy would come up to me and say, "Steve's flipping out."

We waited four days for those people to leave. By the time we got into it, we couldn't find the second hole, so we left eight kilos there. Everybody was in such a panic mood: "Where'd we put it?" "I don't know, let's get out of here."

But that was probably the most exciting thing that happened. Mostly it was pretty run of the mill. It sounds a lot more on the edge than it really was. But I stayed overseas a long time. I came back once for a little bit, and that's when I went back to college for a while. I didn't cut it there either. So I went back to Europe, then I went to the Middle East, basically hung out in the Middle East a lot.

SA'ADAH: *What were you doing in the Middle East?*

SHEPARD: I'm not sure. Just hanging out, really. I kept thinking I was going to write, and I didn't.

SA'ADAH: *Had you been doing any writing up to this point, other than the poetry?*

SHEPARD: Just poetry. The first fiction I wrote was in 1980. When I applied to Clarion I wrote a story. I had a good background. My father beat a classical education into me pretty much, I mean literally beat it into me. By the time I was twelve I had a major-league knowledge of all the English Romantic poets and the Greek histories,

"It was like kung fu writing . . . I was having a lot of mental difficulty, so I was writing in self-defense."

Thucydides and like that, Shakespeare—to the extent that I can still quote, to everyone else's unending boredom, major sections of this shit. He made me do that. Probably one of the reasons that I didn't start writing until real late. He wanted me to be a writer. I kept saying that I was going to be a writer, but I did everything to avoid it, except the poetry. That was short and easy.

So I was just basically hanging out in the Middle East, just goofing around, wiping out, just like people were doing back in the late Sixties and early Seventies. There was a lot of people doing the same thing. I worked a couple of times. I worked for a perfume merchant in Cairo, named Abdul Afifi.

SA'ADAH: *That's a detail that found its way into "A Spanish Lesson."*

SHEPARD: Right. A lot of that stuff's true. The only thing that wasn't true was the fantasy element.

SA'ADAH: *I was hoping that you were going to say that that part was true also.*

SHEPARD: Well, there were a lot of other fantasy elements that I didn't put into the story that were, but I don't think that Ed [Ferman] would have printed them. But all the people, essentially, all the details that weren't injected with otherworldly crud.

SA'ADAH: *It read very realistically, but then a lot of your fiction does. So I wasn't really sure. It had an autobiographical tone.*

SHEPARD: Well that was. All the stuff about my character, that was about right.

SA'ADAH: *A portrait of Lucius Shepard as a young man.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, that was about it. A real cretin. The thing in Egypt was cool. It was sort of semi-fraught with danger, not anything terrible. There were some edgy moments from time to time.

Basically I was a shill. I would steer people to this guy's place and he would sell them drugs or antiquities or whatever. He was a money collector. He would be gathering large sums of money. If China wanted to buy some German equipment, he would be getting together a million bucks in Deutschmarks. So there was some interesting moments around those operations. But basically I just hung out with him. I was his pet American.

Arabs are very amused by Americans. They like to watch them get high. You smile, and goof around, and they think that's really weird. They just generally have a kind of paternal attitude. That's why it's so funny, with the current thing, the anti-Arab stuff here. Because I think Arabs are quite fond of Americans, like we are of our cats and dogs. They're not really that sinister. Generally it's just the circumstances that make them seem so.

I was in Afghanistan for a while, just hanging out, did nothing, just wandering around. I walked across Turkey, which was a weird thing to do, across the Cappadocian Plain.

SA'ADAH: *Did you get hassled?*

SHEPARD: Not much. A little. What I basically got was real sick. Real sick. Real, real sick. I was in

LIFE DURING WARTIME

BANTAM NEW FICTION



"LUCIUS SHEPARD IS A RARITY: A NOVELIST FOR OUR TIME IN OUR TIME."
—RUSSELL BANKS, author of *CONTINENTAL DRIFT*

LUCIUS SHEPARD

Shepard's *Life During Wartime*, Bantam Books.

these caves. The Cappadocian Plain has all these little lumpy hills that almost look fake. They're full of these caves where these old Coptic lunatics used to live and meditate. All this graffiti is on the walls inside, and they're going, shiver, shiver, hallucinating and having all kinds of proto-Christian nightmares. I'd start hearing things.

It was basically something I really don't want ever to do again. People would do things like climb Mt. Everest alone, I guess I respect them. I think they're probably nuts. But that's as close as I ever came to something like that.

SA'ADAH: *A lot of young Americans traveling in Asia and the Middle East at that time had that problem, the physical thing of just running down. Strange diseases.*

SHEPARD: Even down South. The same thing. Especially in Turkey. I drank some water one time, and I looked in there and saw little white things swimming in it.

Nepal is the worst, though. Dysentery comes in the dust, you can't escape it. You can sit there and drink Coca-Colas and eat cellophane-wrapped food and you're still going to get sick. It's too bad, because it's such a wonderful place. I was thinking about going back there, but I just can't take the dysentery. If I wasn't working it'd be all right, but I want to stay relatively healthy.

There's a lot of little weird stories, but essentially I just bummed around until about '72, '73. I came back and got married and started a rock'n'roll band.

SA'ADAH: *So we're back in the South.*

SHEPARD: No, I'm up in Detroit now. I married this girl I met down in North Carolina. She was from Detroit. Uh, how did this happen? We were in Florida, we had a car and were driving across—and we broke down in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

So we just ended up staying there. We were going to California to live in this kind of a weird commune, but we didn't do that.

I started getting into bands. I had a checkered and absolutely abysmal experience of doing that. It's a really rough business.

SA'ADAH: *What instrument did you play?*

SHEPARD: I basically was a songwriter and singer. I played some keyboards. I played some rhythm guitar. I did a lot with synthesizers.

One of the books I'm writing now is a rock'n'roll book, it's called *Mister Right*. It's a sort of pun. The protagonist's name is Taylor Wright.

SA'ADAH: *What was your attraction to music? What pulled you in?*

SHEPARD: I didn't have to write.

SA'ADAH: *Still avoiding that.*

SHEPARD: Probably, yeah. It was always sort of what I was programmed to do. You know how it is. I had the big fear of failure that a lot of people are stuck with when you have very aggressive parents, aggressive in their education of their children. You never think you can come up to it.

Rock'n'roll was a group effort. I thought that would make it easier. It really wasn't. Keeping a band together is worse than the Yankees. Anywhere up to seven or eight major egos. People are out after promoting their own number on the stage. So you have to have a leader, and usually a sub-leader.

SA'ADAH: *Did you fulfill the function of a leader?*

SHEPARD: I was the leader, but the sub-leader is actually more important. It's like good cop/bad cop. The leader's the bad cop and the sub-leader explains it, "Lucius is just temperamental, man, he's not really mad at you." He does all the

"Everybody kept telling me, in the studio, to fuck all these idiots. Just get a few people you can trust and start laying down tracks, and I probably should have. Them's the breaks."

explaining, like explains to the bassist that just because the drummer broke everything in his room, it doesn't mean anything. It was like a fit and he apologizes.

I've broken up fights between girlfriends in parking lots who didn't want to ride back in the same car together. It's this kind of high school crap that goes on.

Musicians are like baseball players. Most baseball players don't go to college. They bounce a ball in their glove until they're seventeen, then they go into the rookie leagues. All of a sudden they're twenty-four years old and they're in New York City making three hundred grand. They have no information.

A lot of rock'n'roll musicians, start out when they're real young, early teens. They bang away in a garage for a while, skip school, skip college, then they end up in their mid-twenties with even less information than baseball players because they don't have enough money to buy any.

SA'ADAH: *The bands that you were in, were they performing units? Were you out there on the road a lot?*

SHEPARD: Oh yeah. We were out there gigging, which is foolish. That's not the way to make it. The way to make it in music is to go into a studio and make good tapes. That was my stupidity. I was really loyal to these people I played with, even when they would fuck me around. There were some times when they would fuck me around when I wasn't loyal to them, some extreme cases. But even when they were screwing up I would try to rationalize it. We were playing pretty steadily.

SA'ADAH: *What about the creative end of this, in terms of the songs that you were creating? Were you getting a lot of satisfaction out of the music?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. I really liked writing songs. I wrote some really good songs. It's not that just I think so, they were really good. In fact, I'm going to be trying to do something with them this summer.

SA'ADAH: *Still the same material, or new stuff?*

SHEPARD: Some of them, yeah, but I've never stopped writing songs. Well, I'm writing a whole bunch of rock'n'roll stuff. I had to write a whole album for this book. Then I've got a series of rock'n'roll stories I'm doing, based on this character called the Queen Mother. So I had to write feminist rock songs, which is kind of interesting.

SA'ADAH: *The songs that you're writing for the book, are these actual songs that you could actually perform?*

SHEPARD: I haven't written charts, but I could play them on my guitar. Since September, October, I've probably written thirty songs, which is a lot compared to what I have

done over the past three or four years. My ex-brother-in-law lives up in Boston, and we're going to try to get into a studio at some point during the summer before I split, make some roughs and see if we can at least sell the songs, because we feel pretty good about them. But I don't want to perform again.

SA'ADAH: *This is the first time you've put a lot of energy back into music since the bands broke up.*

SHEPARD: Yeah. It was destructive. Things happen to rock'n'roll bands that people wouldn't believe. You go into a bar and you see some guys up there and it looks real basic. These guys get their stuff together and practice, and they come in here. But the shit you have to go through is unreal. Just the logistics of getting everybody to practice alone... But dealing with barowners, I think they all must come from one little crack in the earth. They're just out to screw you constantly. I had a gig at this one place in Detroit, really nice club. So I came in there to check out the sound. He had coming attractions, and our picture wasn't up there in the right date. At that point there were a lot of bikers who liked our band, so I had these two bikers with me. So we walked over to the guy and said: "What's this shit? What's these guys doing in our slot?" The guy said, "Oh well, I just moved these guys in." I said, "Well hey, that's really not good. I've been counting on this." The bikers kind of loom over me and I say, "I really want to play, I really want a four-nighter, man."

So what he does, is he opens up his book, and he goes down the list and he wipes out two bands and sticks us in.

That's the way they work. Contracts are a joke. The Musician's Union is a joke. The union does nothing. They'll get you two benefit gigs a year. But if you try

"If I ever feel like I've learned enough to where I'm satisfied, it's probably time to become a beach-comber."

and have them back up anything, if you say this guy screwed us, they'll laugh and say what can we do?

SA'ADAH: *Just out of curiosity, what was the name of your band?*

SHEPARD: There was a lot of them. When I started out, I was in a blues band called The Cathouse Band. Then I was in another band called Demon, just a whole bunch. Cult Heroes and things like that. We had different names. We never kept the same name, because the personnel would change, and the music would change.

SA'ADAH: *So there wasn't one great name that stands out.*

SHEPARD: No. Mister Right was probably the best band we had. It was a cool band. It was one that got busted up by women which is the other great thing that nukes bands. Which isn't really chauvinistic, it's just true.

This one happened because I had a drummer from a small town in northern Michigan, who was a real good drummer, and a keyboard player who hadn't had a girlfriend for about a year, and got a girlfriend from the same town as the drummer was from.

So the band starts getting hot. People start snooping around, record companies are interested, and the

girls start saying, uh—oh, because here comes all these groupies. They start putting pressure on these guys, saying, the band's not going to make it.

It was against all logic, because the band was looking real good. They said: "This is a waste of your time here, you should be making \$90 a night playing in a piano bar."

So we were supposed to go in and make a tape one day, in one of the old Motown studios in Detroit. I went over to these people's house to pick up their equipment, and they had left a note on the door. The note said: "This is the most irresponsible thing we've ever done." I had to agree. They took out a seven-piece band and screwed up about eight other people.

SA'ADAH: *That was a large band, horns?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. It was really a weird band. It was like '76 and we were doing this weird kind of...there was a lot of Hi Life influence in it...

SA'ADAH: *You mean African Hi Life?*

SHEPARD: It was really ahead of its time. I was into the UNESCO recordings, and all the ethnic recordings from Africa. I was listening to this stuff, and it was just fantastic. So all this stuff was going into it.

SA'ADAH: *Was that an influence you picked up while you were traveling, or were you just naturally curious?*

SHEPARD: I heard some stuff in Sudan that really knocked me out.

SA'ADAH: *Folk music? Or electric music?*

SHEPARD: This was just folk. I heard these zither players, then I heard a couple of xylophone players. These guys had xylophones that were, I can't remember what kind of

wood the keys were, but the resonators were gourds. They'd chop a little hole out of the gourd and cover it with spiderweb. It would fuzz it out and make these incredible harmonics.

So I got a synthesizer to do that. I really liked that. We were doing some really interesting music, nice songs. It wasn't just your basic Midwestern heartland boogie stuff, it was pretty avant garde for those days.

SA'ADAH: *That's interesting. That's an unexpected influence.*

SHEPARD: I really like African music. Now I listen to someone like Paul Simon, and it's phllphh.

SA'ADAH: *It's always a drag when everyone catches up to where you were.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, well Talking Heads, I know they listen to the same records I did, exactly. And Herbie Hancock, some of his albums that were coming out in the late Seventies and early Eighties—riffs that I heard on a really great record from Chad, a three record set.

SA'ADAH: *Which one was that?*

SHEPARD: I can't remember the name of the record. It was a big brown box with three records.

SA'ADAH: *On Ocora?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. They had great xylophone music. The best thing they had were these guys who made music by making armpit farts. It was amazing, get a whole tribe doing that.

But they had great xylophone and great choral stuff, terrific melodies. Not too many people know about Ocora.

SA'ADAH: *I'm an African music fanatic. That's what I listen to at home. So I have a sympathetic ear.*

SHEPARD: That's a great record, I don't know what it is. A big box,

brown, it's one of the best African records I ever heard, for ripping off, anyway.

So, like I was saying, the things that can blow up a band are infinite, like personalities, women, bad breaks—it just comes at you. It's a really dumb way to go about making a living. You meet incredible sleaze, just unbelievable sleaze. The publishing business, which has its own varieties of sleaze, is like dealing with the archangels compared with the music business. Promoters, man, those guys can vanish by turning sideways, just, wow, they're gone.

SA'ADAH: *So you burned out on rock'n'roll.*

SHEPARD: Definitely, absolutely. Too many disappointments, and I was stupid. It was probably on purpose, somehow, I was probably trying to self-destruct or something. Everybody kept telling me, in the studio, to fuck all these idiots. Just get a few people you can trust and start laying down tracks, and I probably should have. Them's the breaks.

SA'ADAH: *My favorite answer to the question of why did you become a musician is; somebody was interviewing James "Blood" Ulmer, and he was saying: "Well, I liked the life-style, and it was either that or find a job."*

SHEPARD: Yeah, that's it. It's an easy way to excuse yourself from life. James "Blood" Ulmer's a very good guitar player. But when you look at the average musician, who's sitting there beating his brains out for twenty bucks, thirty bucks a night, in some pit, and ends up in Blondie's Cafe at four in the morning, with half a hangover and enough money to buy a cup of bad breath and a donut, just sitting there like this, zombieing out the window: "How ya doin', Doug?" "Oh, I'm all right, man." Those guys are like combat veterans. You



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see them in their early thirties and they're gone. What're they gonna do? They're the guys who become the insurance salesmen, the used car dealers. What else can they fucking do? They just lose it. They have no expertise in anything, except bomp, bomp. Most of them aren't good enough to do session work.

SA'ADAH: *But you kept moving on.*

SHEPARD: Well, my wife got sick of me being depressed around the house, because I was really in a foul mood after this last band broke up, I didn't have the energy to get one going.

So I'd sit around, fart around, write a song, go down and get drunk in the afternoon at Mr. Flood's Party, which is this old musical hangout where a lot of bands got started, like Commander Cody and Asleep At The Wheel. All these country bands, blues bands used to play there. I'd go down there and get drunk and someone was playin', I'd sit in. It was awful.

Then my wife read about this workshop at Michigan State, Clarion, and she said: "Why don't you go there?" And I said I don't wanna go there, and she says: "Why don't you just fucking do *something*?"

So I went there. I wrote a story and submitted it and they accepted it, and I went there. Got a divorce out of it. I wrote two stories while I was there, didn't do much writing. But everybody liked the first two stories, so I figured that's cool, I must be all right. One of them was "Green Eyes."

SA'ADAH: *Which portion of the novel?*

SHEPARD: The whole novel, really, It's like a five thousand word version of the novel, except it all takes place on one night.

Essentially the story of the novel is that this woman makes this guy fall in love with her, and do all these things for her. So this is just checked out into one night, which is

"Man I didn't even know what the fuck a subtext was, when I was writing *Green Eyes*."

mostly spent on Bourbon Street.

SA'ADAH: *So the stuff with the construct and the house....*

SHEPARD: It's all basically in Tulane. This guy wants to go outside, and she feels sorry for him, so she steals him, kidnaps him, and drags him outside, and basically the plot is he goes down and has a drink on Bourbon Street and keels over. It's a sort of a relationship involved in that.

I submitted that after Clarion, and *Omni* said it was too weird, and *Twilight Zone* said it was too bizarre.

I liked that. It really gave me a lot of confidence about science fiction.

SA'ADAH: *The two stories that you wrote while you were at Clarion, and the story that you wrote to get in there, were they moving in a direction toward SF?*

SHEPARD: Well Clarion is essentially a science fiction workshop. Its only virtue to me was that it was sixty miles away. I'd read some science fiction, but it was certainly wasn't my main reading. Generally speaking, I didn't like most of what I had read. I don't mean to offend anybody by that, but most of what I read, I just didn't think was very well written. The stuff I did think was well written—I'm not sure if I would still think so. Maybe I would.

I haven't gone back. It was kind of funny. I went there, it was

just something to do. I figured my wife just wanted me out of the house. They accepted this, so I'll do it.

The story I submitted was a sort of a Central American fantasy. Actually it wasn't a story, it was half a story, because they had a limit on length. They liked that, and accepted me. I wrote that and I wrote "Green Eyes" and this other story that's never gotten published called "Jailwise." It's about this time I was in Brooklyn House over here...

SA'ADAH: *Brooklyn House of Detention?*

SHEPARD: Yeah, yeah, lovely place.

SA'ADAH: *New York is known for its fine jails.*

SHEPARD: Brooklyn House, I hear, is not among the lower percentile, but it's enough for me.

SA'ADAH: *Doesn't take much, does it?*

SHEPARD: It's sufficient to get the kind of flavor of what it might be in the Big House. Then I sort of had this relationship bust on my marriage, it got all screwed up with that. That was Clarion for me. Well, I don't know. I met all these people I kind of liked. I really liked some of them. I got along with A. J. Budrys real well, and Avram Davidson.

SA'ADAH: *Were they the instructors?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. Also Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm. Some of the people I met there I really liked, some of them I still know. There's a couple of people living here in New York from my Clarion, like Paul Witcover who's a writer in the process of selling a novel to Bantam. There's some neat people.

I left Clarion and I was fuzzed because my marriage was breaking up. So I went out to the West Coast and I started writing. I was

probably writing about fifteen, sixteen hours a day, say, from four months after Clarion until not long ago. Actually, for at least two years, I was probably averaging about thirteen, fourteen hours a day writing, just learning how.

SA'ADAH: *Was this a big change in your work habits? From being in a rock'n'roll band...*

SHEPARD: From being in a constant state of semi-sloth... Yeah, oh God, it was like somebody got let out. This goddamn workaholic got let out. It was like kung fu writing, because I was going through this really bad relationship with a married woman, which I don't recommend. Young boys, stay away. I was having a lot of mental difficulty, so I was writing in self-defense. Of course, I was writing all these stories about married women, so it was self-defeating.

SA'ADAH: *The interesting thing to me about what you said, was that you were learning.*

SHEPARD: Oh yeah. Sure. I'm still learning. If I ever feel like I've learned enough to where I'm satisfied, it's probably time to become a beachcomber. Definitely I was learning. I had a lot of advantages over people in my class.

First of all, I had done a lot, and I had this terrific background in the English language, which I got before the age of twelve, so it really stuck. I really knew all those moves, all those slick iambs and shit. I could toss those around. So that was a real help. It was a little easier for me than for most people who went to Clarion. I was probably a little advanced of them. It was still a lot to learn.

SA'ADAH: *So, there seems to be, in this period that you're talking about, this tremendous motivation, all this creativity coming out at once. Where do you think that was coming from?*

"I wrote two stories while I was [at Clarion]. But everybody liked them, so I figured that's cool, I must be all right. One of them was 'Green Eyes.' "

SHEPARD: I always told stories a lot. This was probably my father's program coming out. This tape may not show it, but I've always been fairly entertaining, I tell stories and stuff. I get around people and they like to hear all the stuff I've done. So I lie a lot. I've always been doing that. Naturally, that's the place to go with that, is writing them down. Except that it's a lot easier to tell them, when you're drunk or something. I guess that was there.

The creativity part, I don't know what that is. That's something the psychologists will tell us some day.

SA'ADAH: *So, during this period of intense writing, did you have it in mind that you were going to support yourself as a writer?*

SHEPARD: Definitely. I didn't have any money. I had a little money, but not a lot. I had to support myself. So I sold a book.

SA'ADAH: *That was your first sale?*

SHEPARD: My first sale was sold to *New Dimensions*, a story called "Black Coral." Then *New Dimensions* tubed. That was the last one, it got bounced. Then it ended up being printed by *Universe* a few years

later, with all the cuss words taken out, because they sell to libraries, so you can't have that.

I guess the next thing I sold was the novel. I lied about that. Terry Carr called me up and said he really liked "Black Coral." He'd seen it, he'd bounced it because he didn't think I could cut out the cuss words and have a story. So he called me up and asked me if I had a novel.

Oh yeah, I said, I got one right here. I said I'll let you see it as soon as it's done. He said three chapters and an outline would be good, and I said okay, you got it. So I buzzed out three chapters and an outline and sent it to him. I knew it was shit. I started rewriting it the minute I put it in the mail, and kept sending him rewrites. So he bought it.

I finished that and then I decided that I didn't want to write another novel until I learned more about how to write. So I started writing short fiction a lot.

SA'ADAH: *Something I wanted to ask you about Green Eyes. I was talking to Steve Brown before, and he mentioned that there was a whole section of that book which actually didn't make it into the paperback. Could you elaborate on that?*

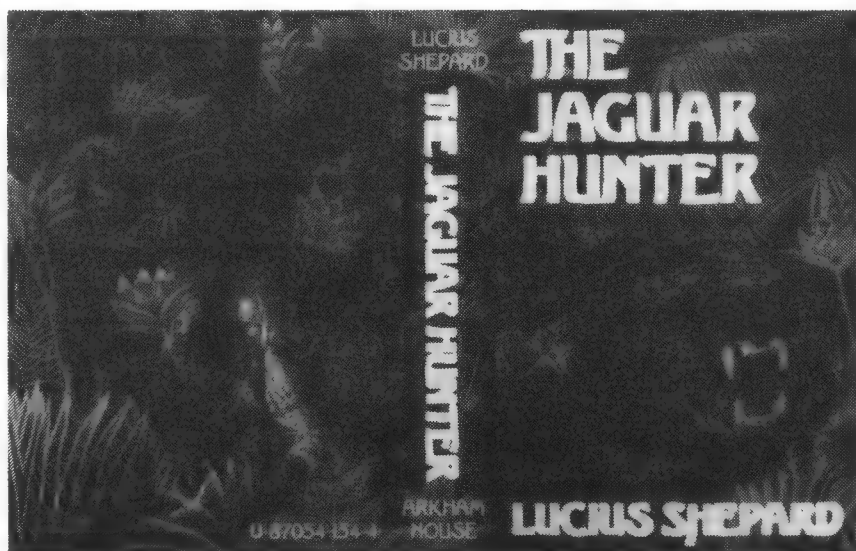
SHEPARD: Yeah. Seventy pages.

SA'ADAH: *Was that your decision to leave that out?*

SHEPARD: My decision, yeah. It was foolish. It was the paranoia of a novice writer. My book was already coming in, probably twenty thousand, thirty thousand words over what they said I could do. I thought that was graven in stone.

Then I saw *The Wild Shore* and I said, "Son of a bitch, man" because that was a 150,000 word book. That really pissed me off, but by that time it was too late.

That was a neat section. It's right after Donnell gets out and



THE JAGUAR HUNTER by Lucius Shepard
Arkham House, 1987, \$21.95

Reviewed by John Shirley

I was auditioning guitar players, and I'd heard so many they were all beginning to merge into one feed-back-laden drone. And then Chris Cunningham jacked in, and a few bars later I knew I was hearing someone who spoke guitar. Someone with a Sound--and a full control over the instrument's range of possibilities. Time to send the other guitar players home. I knew it *instantly*.

Same thing happened a few years ago when I returned to reading SF, was wading through the droners in *Omni* and *Asimov's* and *F&SF*--and suddenly Lucius Shepard jacked in. I don't remember what the specific story was, but a few paragraphs on, I knew I was hearing a guy who could play; who stood out head and shoulders above the rest. I knew it *instantly*.

At his best, Shepard has it all. Style, story and substance. He's also, it seems, a compulsive experimenter. One story will be a dense, third person "magic realism" narrative, steeped in a very distinct viewpoint--like the title story in

this collection, "The Jaguar Hunter"--and another, e.g. the one I found in *Asimov's* a while back, will be flippant first person pastiche, with a deliberately silly resolution. Both stories, though, will be stylistically immaculate.

A few SF readers have dismissed some of Shepard's oeuvre due to his tendency toward "blurrily resolved" endings, and their own inability to maintain narrative traction in his dense, hallucinogenic milieu. This might indicate that he's simply transcended SF's insistently pulp boundaries. Stories like "Mengele"--a horror story about the Nazi doctor in the jungles of Paraguay--taper off like a Brancusi, coming to a thematic conclusion (in this case the spiritually franchised, xeroxed, perverse emptiness of modern life) without achieving a clear-cut narrative conclusion; without playing the usual clichéd SF game. His stories sometimes resolve sharply, other times they descend into the nightmare of ambiguity that is our daily confrontation with life. Where is the beginning and the end of a painting by Max Ernst? In *The Jaguar Hunter* Shepard has given us

great simmering dollops of imagery that explore, in metaphor that rings true with insight, the immorality and ironic contrasts of the world we are sliding into. Without any noisy proselytizing, he clearly demonstrates, in the transcendent "R & R" and the masterfully eerie "Salvador," the misshapen sense of the world that is leading Americans--in 1987--to underwrite the butchery of innocent civilians in El Salvador and Nicaragua. He paints his grim portrait of us--all of us--with a mastery of style that is second to none in the field. He immerses us in viewpoint so deeply we understand even the significance of hallucinations, the relevancy of sheer paranoia. We see for the first time the traps of personal perspective--as if he's rolled back the foliage of the experiential jungle and revealed the boobytraps left by the Vietcong of the mind.

Consider the soldiers in "R & R" and "Salvador." Paranoid on army-issue drugs (something more than drugs, actually--sluicings from the fight-and-flight centers of the brain, RNA-borne reflexes and warrior mindsets, primed into ampules), jacked into the fighting high-tech of the near-future, stamped by the dehumanization of displacement and training into psychological deformity (like the symbol-pregnant physical deformity "Mengele" whimsically imparts), Shepard's soldiers emerge as strikingly apt symbols of our society's own immediate future. In the middle ages, artisans wove tapestries depicting great battles and significant events that made up their time; Shepard, in *The Jaguar Hunter*, has woven just such an episodic tapestry of a time to come, and woe to you if you don't see your own face in it. ●

runs away. Then he needs money, so he goes to New Orleans and becomes a poker player, plays a lot of card games. There's a really good scene in there, about a thirty-page card game. It probably would have made a better book with it in it.

SA'ADAH: *So we lost a thirty page card game.*

SHEPARD: A thirty page card game, and forty pages of stuff. The reason I said it probably would have made a better book, is that some of the stuff that happens later in the book was set up better with that in it. I offered it to my English publisher, but they didn't seem too enthused. I said I couldn't force them. They didn't want to reshoot the whole printing thing.

I was thinking about turning it into a graphic novel with this artist named J.K. Potter. I don't know if you're familiar with him.

SA'ADAH: *Yeah. He's illustrated several of your stories in Isaac Asimov's.*

SHEPARD: He did my short story collection.

SA'ADAH: *I didn't know he was doing stuff besides illustration. I didn't know he was into graphic storytelling.*

SHEPARD: I don't think he has been, but we're talking about it. We're thinking of taking part of that book. This is real iffy. Maybe taking something off that and doing this real pretty graphic novel.

He's got a problem. J.K., people think of him as a splatter artist.

SA'ADAH: *Splatter artist?*

SHEPARD: He got started doing Scream Press stuff, with a lot of horror stories. So people tend to think that that's all he can do. Which is bullshit, because he's real good. So this would take him out of that more. *The Jaguar Hunter*

"My notebooks are just like graphs of insanity."

collection would too. We were thinking about sometime this fall of getting together and trying to do something with it.

I want to do some more about New Orleans and Louisiana. It's a truly bizarre state. Whether it's science fiction or not. I don't really care. I just want to do something, because it's fascinating. Real beautiful visual imagery all over. It's a great state to write about for someone who's into setting a lot and likes to use it in his work.

SA'ADAH: *Something I wanted to ask you. The work that you've published up to the time of this interview, of course, has been mostly short stories, one novel. By the time this interview is published, hopefully you're going to have one, maybe two books in print. The Jaguar Hunter should be in print, and Life During Wartime should be coming out shortly after that.*

But up until now, anybody that's interested in your work has had to hunt through different magazines to find the stories. One thing I was curious about, the stories that you're selling to the different markets, F&SF, Isaac Asimov's, were you tailoring those particular stories to those particular magazines?

SHEPARD: No. Well, a couple of them. A couple of the lesser ones, where I needed five or six hundred bucks. Some of the stories I'm not real proud of, like there's a story called "The Storming of Annie Kinsale," and there's another story called, jeez, I can't even remember the title. Something about Fidel Castro. ["Reaper"]

SA'ADAH: *Those were two that I missed. That's one thing that I wanted to get to later on. I'm trying to compile a bibliography to go along with the interview, for those that are completists, and are trying to track down those off-the-wall stories.*

SHEPARD: I just throw them away, man. That's my problem. Because I move around and I don't keep anything. There's a couple like that that I... I mean, they weren't *bad* stories, but they weren't up to the others, I don't think. Maybe they were bad stories. Anyway, I just did them for the money. There's a story I sold to *Omni* I did for the money.

SA'ADAH: *Which story was that?*

SHEPARD: It hasn't come out yet, if it ever does.

SA'ADAH: *When you say that, that you sold this thing for the money, does that imply that there's less of your life's blood in this?*

SHEPARD: No. It's like, I got the feeling that I could sell Ellen Datlow a story. So I kept trying. I wrote her a couple of stories that weren't suitable for *Omni* that I thought were pretty good. One was "Mengele," which really isn't an *Omni* story. It ended up in *Universe*. A story called "The Arcevoalo" appeared in *F&SF* last year. I thought they were okay, but she didn't like them.

So finally I sold her one called "Youthful Folly". But by the time... I was fried out trying to sell a story to her. She liked the elements, but I don't think I did my best work. I sold her another story later that I think's a really good story, called "Life of Buddha."

SA'ADAH: *Which is yet to be published.*

SHEPARD: It was simply a matter of needing money and trying to do something, and with McCarthy at

Asimov's, she had to fill a magazine, so it was pretty easy to do.

SA'ADAH: *So you've established good relations with a lot of editors at this point. To the outside reader, your publications were a sudden burst of stories on the market. It was somewhat meteoric. Was it like that from your perspective?*

SHEPARD: It was designed. My feeling about writing short fiction was twofold.

One was, it couldn't hurt me as a writer, to experiment with form. There were a lot of stories that I wrote that I worked hard on, that I don't think I would have written except as an experiment. There was a story called "How The Wind Spoke At Madaket." I'm not really into horror writing, but I wanted to try writing a horror story. Things like that. I just wanted to play with things, just get loose with it a little bit more.

Also, I realized from looking at science fiction history that the best way to make a reputation was in short fiction. The best way to make one quick. John Varley and people like that. They come along and they blow off about twenty-five stories real quick and get a reputation. If I come out with, say, another novel, I don't think I would have had half the visibility at this point that I do.

SA'ADAH: *You certainly set the stage for your novels.*

SHEPARD: That's what you've got to do, I think. You don't gotta, but in this field, it really helps. I think it's a good strategy for a writer. Obviously, you don't have to do that to be a commercial success, if you take a look at Gibson and people like that. But that happens so rarely. It's much more likely that something like the Varley strategy is going to happen like that. People like George R.R. Martin, same thing, he bops out with a bunch of stories and whazam, he's getting six-figure

"I was in Afghanistan for a while, just hanging out, did nothing, just wandering around. I walked across Turkey, which was a weird thing to do."

advances.

SA'ADAH: *Were you carrying all these forms around with you, or when you started writing were you actually going out and reading what was on the market?*

Looking at some of your pieces that could be definitely typecast as fantasy, a lot of the stuff that was in F&SF, and then there were the Central American pieces, which sort of fall neatly together, and so on. Different chunks of different styles. Were these just sort of springing naturally?

SHEPARD: I don't think I really had them too much in mind. "Salvador" was a surprise. I just sat down and wrote it. It was real quick for me at that time. I wrote it in five or six days. At that point in time it was a very fast piece of work for me, because I was working on a bad typewriter and ripping up pages.

SA'ADAH: *Were you surprised by what came out?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. I sat down and... I can't even remember how I came about the idea. Oh, I know. I was talking to this friend of mine on the phone. She's an organic chemist, she was talking about all these

things that endorphins can do. I don't even know how we got onto endorphins, probably as a mode of consciousness enhancement. I said, well if you can do that, you can probably turn people into this and that.

I've always been pretty much Leftist, and there was a lot of shit in the paper about El Salvador at that time. I'd been down there in the recent past, so it just came together like that, real quick.

SA'ADAH: *That leads into what I wanted to talk about. Basically the issue of war, writing about war.*

Specifically you've published pieces about a war in Central America which, although they are science fiction, they're entirely plausible, considering the fact that we're already in a covert war down there.

Also, you've written pieces about Vietnam, two of which were published recently in In the Field of Fire.

I want to sound you out about your background for writing these pieces, and your motivation.

SHEPARD: I've seen combat situations in Central America--supposedly covert operations. They didn't seem real covert to me. I've seen Honduran troops in El Salvador and things like that. I know something about what a combat situation is.

It's kind of chic now to talk about *Platoon*, but *Platoon* is a terrific movie about combat. I think that's what it's about. I don't think it's about Vietnam, I think that's secondary. It could be anywhere. It's really about combat. Vietnam is, I think, a much more complex subject than I think you can handle by studying a combat platoon. I think that people are taking this as the statement on Vietnam.

Combat is pretty generally the same everywhere. You have a lot of really scared fuckers yelling their asses off and firing their guns anywhere that looks like something.

That's pretty universal. I don't even think you have to know it to write about it well. If you've ever been scared... I think the one thing about being in a long-term fright situation—to me this is my analogy: if you've ever been in a car crash, there's this moment when you realize it's gonna happen, and a flash of cold goes all through you. Holy shit, everything lights up and gets real particular.

What happens, I think, in a serious combat situation, when you're under that kind of fire, when it starts, you have that flash, then you live inside it for a real long time. So your behavior becomes real different. If people were to all of a sudden drop in for a quick view, they'd think here's a bunch of real lunatics. They're absolutely right, from their standpoint. I think I said in one story that fear has its own continuum of right actions, and that's what I was talking about. Everything you're doing that might seem freaky to someone else is perfectly logical to you.

That's the whole thing in "R & R," about the superstitious shit. You gotta have that, it's part of it and it makes absolute sense. This whole kind of magical thinking you get into which gets even more complex than that. You know, don't step on cracks, wear a parrot feather, it just gets really intricate and you can get real wrapped up in it, and not even know it. It'll be a subroutine more than anything that's really conscious. But it's there. You just develop all these strange behaviors.

SA'ADAH: *Did you find yourself, even as an observer in combat situations, developing those behaviors?*

SHEPARD: Oh yeah. Definitely. You're not really an observer. You may be there to observe, but you've got your hand in the fucking soil. The thing that's different between someone who is in that kind of

capacity, and a combat soldier, is that he can leave. Which is an immense freedom, and it makes you feel very guilty. You can get very screwed up about it. But you can get out of there. Whereas, a lot of times, these guys just don't have an option. You'll find veterans of almost any war who will tell you that combat has a fantastic allure, no matter how horrible it is, just because of the intensity.

I was talking to runaway kids for one of the books I'm writing. I think it's the same thing with them. They have this nightmare life. And yet you find kids who are, say, nineteen or twenty now, and are out of it, looking back fondly. Because there they were, they were right out there on the edge. They were really alert. Maybe they had a lot of bad times, but it was very vivid.

SA'ADAH: *Do you find yourself drawn back to these specific periods in your life, or are these periods still coming up?*

SHEPARD: Lately, in the last two and a half years I've been in New York, it's been the slowest time of my life. I've been working real hard, and going through the usual emotional entanglements and all that shit. So really I haven't been doing a hell of a lot. I've been looking forward to getting out again. I don't have an Ernest Hemmingway complex, I'm not going to war zones or places where people are starving to death. I just want to go somewhere where something could happen. That's the funny thing about me.

A lot happens on the street. Every day the crackmobile comes down Westervelt Avenue, and all the Puerto Ricans go "Here comes the crackmobile." I go out there too. We all go out and look. It's like the ice cream man. Everybody on the street is tragic in their own way. This is a terrible street. It's not a horrific slum like parts of the Bronx, but everybody here is living

a bullshit lie. It's like this legend, that someday they're going to steal something large enough to make them famous, or become cocaine dealer of the year. It's pretty poor but it's a neat street. I'll end up writing about it, but only after I leave it.

Right now it really makes me sick, because there's so much waste. For a long time I haven't felt comfortable in America. Part of that is the political bias, which has kind of crept in over the years. I feel bad being an American sometimes. I've been exposed to a lot of situations where I've felt really fucking bad about it. I've seen some real grungy things that Americans are directly responsible for, and it's given me a kind of weird pitch to the way I feel about this country. I'm not saying that Red China is much better, anything is better. It's just that I'm an American and have trouble sometimes from being down in Latin America a lot, and liking that place. Getting back here and living the good life pisses me off. I guess I just feel better being a little more on the edge.

When you're in your home place, I think you... I do, I tend to slump a little bit and not want to do things as much. You know, you've got your apartment, your friends and everything, and so you get into this routine. I don't really like that too much. I don't like routine. I like to have it exploded once in a while, something coming down the road that I'm not expecting. Here I insulate from that, without even trying to. It's a sort of a natural pattern that you fall into.

So I think I thrive being out of the country more. So I'm going to probably stay out for a while, a year or two anyway.

SA'ADAH: *I wanted to talk about the role of travel. One of the things that separates your writing,*

for me, from a lot of other people's writing, is that it's obvious that you have lived some. You have gone out and experienced things. Whereas a lot of writers are dealing strictly with creations of their own mind.

Obviously you have a tremendous imagination. Some of the fantasy elements in your work, the other realities that people are always stepping into...

SHEPARD: I don't know if it's imagination or just chemicals...

SA'ADAH: Don't you think that's a rather glib answer?

SHEPARD: Yeah. Whether it is or not... Everybody's got an imagination. I think people have good imaginations. People around here have good imaginations, they just don't focus them. So I don't consider that much of an aptitude.

The travel, I don't think it is necessarily right, that you have to travel a lot to be a really good writer, or even a decent writer. I think from my particular bias, I like being kind of a stranger. Not in any kind of a romantic way, I just like being out of my element a little bit. It makes me aware of things more.

Back to the slump thing, I'm aware of it, but there's always a kind of skin between me and things, a little more than there is when I'm, say, in Central America or somewhere else. But there are writers, it seems, who must be like that in some way. Graham Greene, for instance, is a writer who has to be as addicted, probably in a similar way, to being outside his own sphere of comfort and familiarity as I am. I think that different psyches fall into different things.

You meet some people, like a friend of mine down the block from me. He'll say, I'm going to Florida this winter, but he'll never go. He'll never leave this block unless he's pried out of here. It's just my disposition. My sensibilities are

"I realized from looking at science fiction history that the best way to make a reputation was in short fiction. The best way to make one quick."

piqued by travel.

SA'ADAH: When you go down to Central America, what role are you putting on? How are you presenting yourself? How are you carrying yourself as a person?

SHEPARD: I just go down there. I know some people down there and I just hang out.

SA'ADAH: So you're not going down as Mr. Journalist, or Mr. PossiblyWorks-For-The-CIA or any of that kind of stuff.

SHEPARD: No. No. That's not smart. You go down there as Mr. PossiblyWorks-For-The-CIA, and you'll probably end up getting... They'll say, okay, we believe you. They don't take chances with that shit.

SA'ADAH: Do you speak Spanish fluently?

SHEPARD: I probably will, when I go back down there. Right now, you know how it is, you lose it. But it'll get fluent. Within a few weeks it'll start popping pretty good. But like I said, my mom was a Spanish teacher, so I had that ever since I was eight.

SA'ADAH: So the people that you are close to down there are Central Americans, or expatriates?

SHEPARD: It's both, but mostly I'd say that they were Latin Americans, Central Americans, or a lot of blacks that speak English.

In the Caribbean, there is an island, Roatan, that I write about sometimes, which is a bay island off Honduras where they speak English. That's an island that was in a couple of stories, "Traveler's Tale" and "Black Coral." They mostly speak English there, some Spanish, but mostly these people talk a real weird 18, 17th century English, which is kind of neat.

But, yeah, I know a lot of Central Americans. I know a lot of people in Honduras, a few in Guatemala, a few in El Salvador, some more in Panama. I don't know how many people I know are left in Nicaragua right now. There's been some problems down there, so I'm not sure. But I used to know some people down there fairly well.

SA'ADAH: One more thing on the issue of war. There was a Vietnam veteran that wrote an op-ed piece in the Washington Post a few months ago, when Platoon first came out and was getting a lot of attention. His argument was that it was impossible to capture the essence of war through any kind of creative work. And it wasn't so much that he was lambasting people for trying, he just didn't think it was possible.

You've worked at that, and I'm sure you're aware of other creative artists that are trying.

SHEPARD: To capture the essence of war. To capture the essence of your war, I think that's possible. Everybody's war is different. There is no essence of war. If you're going to say, can you get the stink of death--the way dead things smell, the way dead bodies smell, is a pretty common thing in any battlefield situation. I have yet to

see a movie that grabs that one and throws it at you.

And it's difficult in a book. I think it's easier in a book. I think you could probably convey it through a third person or a first person reaction. But I think that's a dumb kind of statement. There are plenty of books I've read on Vietnam that I thought captured the essence of this particular person's point of view on war just fine for me. I'm sure he didn't feel that way. But I think as far as essence goes, it probably captured or conveyed some...

SA'ADAH: *Michael Herr's Dispatches?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. *Meditations in Green* by Stephen Wright, I think that's my favorite book on Vietnam. There's others, *Cooks and Bakers* by Robert A. Anderson, good combat books like Webb's *Fields of Fire*.

SA'ADAH: *Did you ever read Sand in the Wind, Robert Roth? That was a real interesting one. He was a marine, and the book was actually published in 1974, which is why a lot of people haven't heard of it. It's not part of this current spate of Vietnam novels.*

How do you feel about all of this sudden media attention on Vietnam?

SHEPARD: I think it sucks, in a weird way. I hear all these newsmen say isn't it wonderful how we're all having a robust dialogue on Vietnam. What jive! What a jerkoff thing to say. "Robust dialogue." Where'd he get that?

I think that the Vietnam Memorial and all that stuff is really good for the vets in some ways, but in other ways it's just paving it over. It's just creating an opportunity for another one. The Memorial, especially.

In "Shades," one of the stories I have in *In the Field of Fire*, I use a phrase like "this media-sponsored blast of warmth." It's crap, man.

Of course anything that Ronald Reagan says is crap, even if it's true or wrong. He didn't say it, somebody else said it.

Any veteran who is out there is going to be moved by that Memorial. It's an emotional button that's pushed. But you'll find a lot of veterans that react in a very similar way. They'll say that this is jive. Like, "Oh wow, we're getting a memorial. Oh boy!" It's like we're getting a bathroom named after us on the fucking New Jersey Turnpike, it does about as much for them. It's just a big public shoveling under. It's ignoring all kinds of veteran problems that are terrible.

Also, I feel, getting the country ready for the next one; getting the country ready to have an involvement in Central America, no doubt. Which is not absolutely inevitable, but if you look at our foreign policy down there, it's pretty damned inevitable.

SA'ADAH: *I'm sure you're already aware, but we've already created the infrastructure for a war. The landing strips are in place, the troops are down there.*

SHEPARD: They have flights of Apache helicopters, positioning and stuff like that. They're ready to rock. But it's not just that that makes you think about it. Just look back. Any time we have a chance to invade Nicaragua, hey, we go ahead. And that's pretty much true of any other country down there.

SA'ADAH: *Another thing about a lot of the stuff that's been written about Vietnam in the last five years is that it's dealing with the American fighting man, and it's not really dealing with any of the political issues, or the background of the conflict.*

SHEPARD: Now, the stuff that's being written, I don't mind. That's fine. Dealing with the issues... I think if I were writing a book about Vietnam, I would write about basi-

cally the same things these guys are writing about, personal things. Because the issues, man, you know, you get to the issues and that's like, that gets back to history as book. You could go all night on that stuff, what happened and who did this and why this was done and all that crap. The soldier over there, not just the combat soldier, but everybody that was over there--there're a lot of good stories. All together they make an interesting tapestry, whether it's illuminating of the core deals, I don't know.

The stuff that was written right after the war, a lot of it, I thought was more intense in some ways, and more interesting to me personally than a lot of the stuff that's being written now. A lot of the books are falling into formula.

SA'ADAH: *Yeah. It's almost like the Executioner series.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, well, horror novels. The horror novels about Vietnam are coming out. I was going to write one. Somebody offered me a contract to write him a horror novel about Vietnam. At the time I needed the money.

SA'ADAH: *Horror novel in what sense?*

SHEPARD: A horror novel. A Stephen King novel.

SA'ADAH: *Dealing with the supernatural?*

SHEPARD: Right. I had a great idea. I had a fantastic idea. But then I got down to writing it and I said, Jesus I don't want to do this.

SA'ADAH: *Why didn't you want to do it?*

SHEPARD: Basically it was so exploitive, in my own terms, that I just didn't want to deal with it. I didn't think about that, when I agreed to do the book, I was greedy. I said no.

But the horror novels will be

out. I know, because there's a guy who lives down the street who's going to be doing a horror novel with a lot of Vietnam elements in it. Peter Straub's got one coming. They'll be popping up just like old Nazi horror novels.

So, you know, there it goes.

SA'ADAH: *The two stories that were published in In the Field of Fire, "Shades" and "Delta Sly Honey," when did you write those? Were those ideas that had been kicking around?*

SHEPARD: No. Jack Dann's a friend of mine. He just said he'd want me to do something.

SA'ADAH: *They were written specifically for the anthology?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. "Shades" is essentially a preacher, a preachment. I wrote that story just to say some stuff that is embedded in the story.

SA'ADAH: *It's still a good story, too, though.*

SHEPARD: That's cool. I'm glad. But that was why that story came around, because there was just about twenty sentences I wanted to put in there. "Shades" was kind of planned, but "Delta Sly Honey" was more of a kind of surprise, like "Salvador."

Writing about a war... The moral question about writing about a war... You see, I don't worry about capturing the essence of war. What maybe the guy should have said is, and maybe I can relate to this, is that in trying to write about war, I'm glamorizing it. I don't know if that's possible. I really don't. By the fact that you're choosing to, you're saying that this is popular, this is something that people want to read.

Why do all these guys want to read books about the history of war? It's not because they're interested in necessarily what happened. It's because they want to get off on it again. That's part of

" 'Salvador' was a surprise. I just sat down and wrote it. It was real quick for me at that time. I wrote it in five or six days."

it. That's a problem to me.

Even a picture like *Platoon*, that's got glamorization. There's no way around it.

SA'ADAH: *And you find that's true from your own experience, too, despite what you describe as the horrific aspect of it.*

SHEPARD: I would like to write a war novel that made me sick. I may not have wanted that enough until now, so maybe I'll try it again. To really get people gagging and puking, see if that does anything. That's the thing. Movies can't really show what dead people look like. People would be barfing. Dead people are really ugly, especially people that have been fragged or something. They're not great looking. So when you see *The Killing Fields*, it's really toned down a whole lot. The freaky thing is, is that people get used to that.

If you ran a movie over here that really showed some bad death in all its visceral detail, I think you'd have a lot of rush to the exits. It wouldn't do very well at the box office.

If it were a book...I could conceivably think of a book, that you could write without really getting distasteful, that would more or less make people kind of sick in a good way. That's a hard thing to do, and I don't think anybody's

really ever done it. But it's something to strive for, probably.

But *Life During Wartime* is a failure. I mean, it glamorizes it. People say that's harrowing, but I think it's only harrowing in the sense that it involves you. I don't think you come away from it with a terrible nausea.

SA'ADAH: *Let's talk about Life During Wartime. One thing I wanted to mention: I've got the pre-release sheet that Bantam Books has sent out to the book stores advertising Life During Wartime.*

The interesting thing about it is the way that it's presenting Lucius Shepard makes no mention of the fact that you've ever written anything that might be termed science fiction or fantasy.

SHEPARD: They don't want that.

SA'ADAH: *I was wondering if that was a conscious decision on your part, or was it a marketing ploy of theirs?*

SHEPARD: It's on theirs. It's marketing on theirs. [SF] is the kiss of death.

I sold the book as a science fiction book. So I'm about three-quarters of the way through with it, and they say, well, we're going to release this as a mainstream book. So I said, oh man. Because I had science fiction elements up the wazoo in there. Then I was sitting there ripping them out.

SA'ADAH: *Oh. You were?*

SHEPARD: Yeah, oh yeah. Because there was no way this was going to pass muster as a mainstream book, even a mainstream science fiction book, the way it was originally. So I'm sitting there, fffthp, fffthp, throwing these things away. I don't know, it might have worked out. That kind of was a twist for me.

It was called something different, it went through a whole bunch of different titles to get the proper New York tie-ins...



J.K. Potter's illustration for "R & R" from *The Jaguar Hunter* collection.

SA'ADAH: *Were you satisfied with the title?*

SHEPARD: I wanted to call it *Fire Zone Emerald*. I had another way of making that work as a title, a real easy switch of names. I liked that, I thought it was more commercial. But they said it made it sound too much like a war book. We wouldn't want that. So it ended up *Life During Wartime*, which was okay, it was one of my suggestions.

But I think that *Fire Zone Emerald* would have been better.

SA'ADAH: *Which of your Central American stories winds up incorporated into the text of this? "R & R", obviously. Just "R & R"?*

SHEPARD: Just "R & R." Well, "Fire Zone Emerald" is a sort of an outtake. Some of the characters in there are in the book, but it was a whole different thing. There are

elements from "Salvador" in there.

SA'ADAH: *One thing I was curious about, one of the things that always tickled me about the story "A Spanish Lesson" was the last page, after a sort of climax in the story, you took that little literary sidestep there and talked about tacking on morals. For me, it was great, it really added to the story.*

I was just wondering if, in this particular book, we're going to see a moral? Obviously, from what you've expressed, this is an issue you feel strongly about.

SHEPARD: This is a kind of a hybrid book, in a weird way. I think I kind of grew a notch in the writing of this book. Not because I was writing this book, just because of the stuff that was going on with me. I didn't lose enthusiasm for writing the book, or anything like

that, it was just that I all of a sudden understood that if I had just started, it would have been a different book.

Somehow I'm going to have to write another book to cover that.

SA'ADAH: *Specifically dealing with the same milieu?*

SHEPARD: No, not necessarily. It isn't really a subject matter thing, it's more of a kind of particularity of focus. That changed a lot for me while I was writing the book. Just a kind of way of looking at things, a way of... I don't know. It's really hinky to describe this kind of stuff.

SA'ADAH: *I was about to say, is it possible for you to verbalize it?*

SHEPARD: Particularity of focus is about as good as I can get right now.

SA'ADAH: *That'll read well, at any rate.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, yeah, sounds like it means something.

"R & R," the moral, if there's a moral about it, it's a pretty hopeless one. I don't stamp one in there, like I did in "A Spanish Lesson," that was just because of this guy I know laid this thing on me, I was always ending in morals. Yeah, you're right, I said.

SA'ADAH: *As a literary device it worked really well.*

SHEPARD: That was pretty funny. I just did it to mess his mind. Actually he was one of my teachers at Clarion.

But I guess the moral of this book is just that things are really shit, man, and it's really hard to get out of. That's not hardly a moral. I don't know. Probably not, in a real weird way.

It's a strange book. It's not all about the war, in a sense. It takes the war back a ways. There's a heavy-duty relationship in the book, a love story that's all twisted and fucked up. I don't even know what it's about. It was a strange book, because I did go through some changes while I was writing it.

I'm probably less a judge on that book than I probably will be on the ones I'm doing now. I feel like I'm much more in control as a writer, at this point, and this is all due to the kinds of things that were going on during the writing of that book. And, unfortunately, I couldn't incorporate them because it was already written too much. I would have never turned it in.

SA'ADAH: *One of the fun things for me, as a reader of your work, is that it's obvious that you're still growing so much. Just as a writer, and also as a human being, one would assume that, anyway.*

SHEPARD: I'm losing weight, though.

"But college . . . I talked to my advisor, and he says: 'What do you want to be?' And I said well I want to be a writer, and he said: 'Well, what the hell are you doing here?' "

SA'ADAH: *So, just getting back quickly to that issue of how the book is being presented, it's obvious, from this marketing, that this is going to open up your work to, I don't know if a wider range, but certainly a different range of readers.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, oh yeah. I want to be able to write stuff. Right now I'm writing three books.

SA'ADAH: *Simultaneously?*

SHEPARD: That's the way I work. If I tried to work thirteen hours on one book, I'd die about halfway through the day. But this way I can work three or four hours on one, take a shower or whatever, come back and I get a whole fresh thing, a whole boost.

I like my characters, and I'm not tired of them. So it's a really efficient way for me to work. I want to write mainstream stuff, and I want to continue writing whatever I write.

People are always telling me in this field that I don't write science fiction. I find that laughable.

Whatever I'm writing, speculative or whatever... I had people tell me that "Salvador" was not a science fiction story. To me, I think it's absolutely a science fiction story. It's set in the future, it has technology...

SA'ADAH: *And you don't feel uncomfortable with that label, obviously.*

SHEPARD: No. But I'm not going to let it kill me. I have to let Bantam be the boss here. I'm not going to get crazy and say you don't know what you're talking about, guys, I'm Mr. Sci-fi. So they're running the show, and that's cool with me.

But I'm never going to be a person who says well I never wrote science fiction, I was writing dog trash or something like that. I was writing stories that were really just kidding about science fiction.

SA'ADAH: *Perhaps one of the things that they're trying to accomplish by this is just to get people to take the work at face value, to let it stand on its own.*

SHEPARD: Oh sure. That's a big problem. You got Paul Theroux, who writes a piece of crap like *O-Zone*, and it's a mainstream book. Then Gene Wolfe writes a real nice book, and it's sci-fi. So who's got the bigger rep?

I think Gene Wolfe, the way he's going, is going to end up writing rings around Paul Theroux.

SA'ADAH: *He already is.*

SHEPARD: There's some things that Paul Theroux does that Gene Wolfe doesn't do that I appreciate. Although a lot of his work, I mean, this is a personal attack, Paul, comes across to me as thoroughly asshole. Like this guy's really got his head up his ass. That comes over. The personality of the guy comes over. I've never met him, but I've heard that's true, that the guy's one of these fake Englishmen.

To me, it permeates a lot of his work, and Gene Wolfe doesn't have that.

But I do like some of his stuff, especially in his earlier books, like *The Family Arsenal* and things like that. The way he handled characters is different than Gene Wolfe would do. Everybody's got their strengths.

But you got people now, Margaret Atwood doesn't want her book labeled science fictional...

SA'ADAH: *And certainly The Handmaid's Tale could have been popularized as SF.*

Shepard; Yeah, you know, it's up for the Nebula. But she denies it. I understand why, I guess she denies it less and less. Maybe I don't. Maybe she's snotty about it. But if it makes commercial sense for her to deny it, I can understand that. Because you've gotta live, you gotta eat.

But I think you don't have to make that choice. Especially if you're relatively early in your career, and you can do some books in either field. Like Ursula Le Guin. It was not early in her career when she crossed over and became a mainstream writer as it were, as they call her. She's never denied anything about it. I think it's not graven in stone, this ghettoization. But I think you have to be cool, to be careful. And I think Bantam's probably wise in this, if they want to spread it around.

SA'ADAH: *I met Robert Stone recently, and he said that all he's really interested in doing in his work is presenting questions. He feels that his strong suit, what he's good at, is delineating the questions, and he's not really trying to provide any answers.*

SHEPARD: Some dumbass review I read the other day, on *In the Field of Fire*, (I thought it was dumbass, and I usually like this guy's reviews) said that we have to look elsewhere

"I left Clarion and I went out to the West Coast and I started writing. I was probably writing about fifteen, sixteen hours a day, say, from four months after Clarion until not long ago."

for final questions and final answers on Vietnam. I was thinking, yeah, I guess. What the hell does that mean. You can't expect any book is going to do that for you. In fact, if any book attempted it, it would be a foolish book. There are no final questions and answers on this shit. Certainly just questions and answers. Questions are enough.

It seems like a strange way to review, to expect this book to give you your opinion. That's why I think a lot of people are getting their opinion from *Platoon*. It's not a bad movie, it's a good movie, but it's not a movie to get your opinions from. I don't really think that was Oliver Stone's purpose. Oliver Stone was doing some button-push-ing for sure. But I still think basically he was just trying to tell a combat story.

SA'ADAH: *I'd like to talk a little bit about your writing habits, just because I know that a lot of people that are going to be reading this are writers. So just give a sketch about how you go about your work.*

SHEPARD: Well, let's see. I wake up in the morning and take 10cc's of cocaine...no. It depends. I say generally speaking, I get up real early. I get up, like six--that's real early for me--and try to get to work by 7:30 and go as long as I can.

Providing my social life is... Right now I'm going with somebody who works until 9 o'clock in the evening. So that's great for me. Because I don't have anybody telling me, why are you sitting there writing, we could be eating, going somewhere, doing this, doing that. I like to write long hours and I like to write a lot of different things at once. The reason I like to write long hours is because I don't have anything else to do, so why not?

When I was a rock'n'roll musician, I used to just go play pool or something, or fuck off somewhere downtown. But right now this is more fun. So I do that. I have to smoke about five cigarettes to get going, chew the tobacco, get all fucked up with the nicotine before I can get going, which I'd like to quit.

What I do is work on a computer mostly. I'll sit down and rough out a scene in a notebook, real rough.

SA'ADAH: *Not to mention, of course, that we're surrounded by your notebooks here, all over the couch.*

SHEPARD: A lot of times I can't read my handwriting. My writing is hieroglyphics, it really is. But I write it so much, over and over again, that I remember it. So I don't have to read them. My notebooks are just like graphs of insanity.

SA'ADAH: *Whoever does your papers is going to have a great time going through those things.*

SHEPARD: They're going to laugh. I defy you to read some of these. It's absolutely unreadable. But the



J.K. Potter's illustration for "Mengele" from *The Jaguar Hunter* collection. This illustration is a favorite of editor Brown.

thing is, when I get down to the final draft, I'll just go back and do the same paragraph over and over until I like it. So I remember them, and I don't have to refer to the notebooks.

It's like when I was in high school. I would make up cheat sheets, and intend to cheat fully. But by the time I'd made the cheat sheets, I didn't need to cheat. It's a kind of functional morality.

So that's about it. I just bust it from dawn to dusk, if I can. I don't have any method. I usually write a book straight through.

SA'ADAH: *Graphing out the entire thing in advance?*

SHEPARD: Books are different. I wrote *Green Eyes* when I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, where I was going, day to day.

I've got a book now called *Kingsley's Labyrinth*, which just sort of came to me, in a blinding fit of something. It's a totally convoluted plot, real intricate and everything. It just sort of happened one night. So I really got that one fairly well mapped out.

One of the books I'm writing now is called *The End Of Life As We Know It*, which is set up North, in the North country. It's a sort of a fantasy, a strange fantasy. I got the first bunch of that plotted before hand. But after that it just kind of grew. But it's a real easy book to write like that because it's a kind of a narrative, or a chronicle. The way the story's set up, the chronicle has a natural evolution. It's not dependent on plot twist or anything like that.

Whereas *Kingsley's Labyrinth* is a labyrinthine book, it's very full of twists and turns. So it was really lucky that it came all at once, or else I probably wouldn't know how to finish it.

So it's all different as far as structure goes and the work habits are real simple. Basically it's with the computer. Whenever I get

stuck, I go over and write something in a notebook, get it looser.

SA'ADAH: *So you're not real rigid about the structure of the books. Each one is pretty much finding its own structure.*

SHEPARD: Sort of, yeah. Well, *Kingsley's Labyrinth* is an interesting case in point. It's like three stories, three different plots.

One is a kind of an eighties romance.

The other is this kind of mystery that these two guys are trying to unravel that revolves around these two murders that occurred in the 1920's in an actual labyrinth that was built beneath the mansion of a robber baron, one of the old robber barons of Vermont.

And the third book is a book that one of the characters is writing, about one of the guys who died.

The plots are all kind of interrelated, like gears. I don't know where the hell that came from. Because it's not the kind of structure that I would... I mean, it's much more complex than I usually see a book. It was totally surprising.

Whereas, *The End Of Life As We Know It* seems to be more typical me. My personality just, you know, well...here I go!

I guess that's one of the things that happened to me this summer, what I was saying about particularity. I started having more discreet kinds of understanding about different kinds of things. Different subjects seemed to me... I think I was, to some extent, writing ahead of my brain. I wasn't stopping to think about it enough. All of a sudden that brain caught up a little bit, and said, you gotta look at this differently, and this and that sort of all slotted in with all the other information that I had about writing. I have a little better view of exactly what thing I'm going to go on. That's all I know. It's pretty crude.

"I don't have an Ernest Hemingway complex, I'm not going to war zones or places where people are starving to death. I just want to go somewhere where something could happen."

SA'ADAH: *The evidence, of course, will present itself in the work. It's not really even something that you have to verbalize now.*

SHEPARD: But that's what I was saying that frustrated me a little bit about *Life During Wartime*. I had the book too written to use any of this. If I had taken the book and heaved it, I would probably have been happier.

SA'ADAH: *You mentioned before that you're a perfectionist.*

SHEPARD: Yeah. Not all the time. But now I am. I'm getting more so. Certain paragraphs in all this stuff were written thirty times.

SA'ADAH: *So, when you're saying "perfectionist," you're more concerned with the actual writing itself, as opposed to the ideas behind the writing.*

SHEPARD: I don't think they're distinguishable. I think that writing is a craft that demands precision.

When you talk about people being stylists, or idea writers—I don't care what they are, what works best is if they express that precisely. If they make it plain to the reader, as much as possible, the exact right words that will convey what they intend.

So when I've got, say, a sentence with a metaphor in it, some kind of image, I often see that as being part of an idea, or an idea in itself. It may not be an idea like "let's have a big alien artifact out here in space."

To me, it's as important to have the exact moment translated as close as I can to the reader. That becomes part of the ideational structure of a book. The more precise you try to be, the more precise you are. You start gaining in knowledge of what there is to be precise about. I guess that's the only way I can go about it.

As far as separating the ideas from the actual writing, I can't do that, except before I start. I say, well I'm going to write this book, and it's going to be about war and it's not going to be real happy, and that's about as heavy as the idea gets beforehand, usually.

If you're talking like subtext or theme... Like *Kingsley's Labyrinth*, this weird book... I got the plot. And the plot was so intricate that it illuminated the themes as I was writing them. It was like a weird kind of map that showed me all the themes as they popped up. It made me aware of them.

I had an English review about *Green Eyes*, and this guy's talking about my subtext. Man I didn't even know what the fuck a subtext was, when I was writing *Green Eyes*. I barely do now. But he was talking about all this wonderful subtext and stuff, and I was saying whoa, all right.

SA'ADAH: *I take it you don't take your reviewers too seriously. Or do you have a problem with that?*

SHEPARD: No, I don't have any

problem with good or bad reviews. Rock'n'roll did me that. I mean, I've had guys come up to me staggering out of the haze and saying, hey you guys is better than the Rolling Stones, and then I've had people throw shit. That gives you a little callus, brickbats and roses and all that shit.

But I really like getting an intelligent review. Whether he doesn't like it or not, at least there's something. I got this one review of *Green Eyes* in *Foundation* that was really neat. Because the guy had actually thought about it.

A lot of reviews I've gotten... Well obviously a lot of my stuff is short fiction, so short fiction reviewers don't have a lot of time to spend on it. I can't fault them, really.

But there have been some really doltish reviews. It doesn't make me mad or anything like that.

SA'ADAH: *It doesn't throw you off your stride, or anything...*

SHEPARD: No. It's like rock'n'roll. You put it out there and people get to dance to it or beat you over the head.

It kind of puzzles me that people could, not misinterpret, but that they could misapprehend the basic intent of the story. I think that's different than interpreting. Then I think, well, maybe it's me. But it doesn't really slow me down or make me go pacing around with my hand to my forehead.

A lot of writers I know, especially people who are in academic fields and write, seem to have a lot more trouble with reviews. Because they're the ones who write them, too, so they're real sensitive to that. It's nice to get a good review, because maybe it can sell some books, that's about as far as it goes.

People talking about my subtext is all very nice, but what impressed me about that was that the guy [in *Foundation*] had really

"I don't like routine. I like to have it exploded once in a while, something coming down the road that I'm not expecting."

looked at the writing and said something that I knew I was doing, which was making the writing part of the plot. Making the style part of the movement of the book, part of the plot, working it in. I liked him saying here's this kind of sentence here, you know, and this shows how the setting is a character in this book. I really dug that. I thought that was really cool. Because nobody else had said that, and that was exactly what *Green Eyes* for me was. It was a book in which everything is falling apart, rotting. Everything is going through these mutations and changing. The fact that he saw that was great. I was very appreciative. He could actually have hated the book and just said that and I would have been really pleased.

SA'ADAH: *Have you had much of a chance to get much feedback from readers of your work?*

SHEPARD: Readers. Not a lot. I get some mail and stuff like that. Most of the people who bother to write me are not going to write me saying, you monster.

I got one letter from a lady correcting a fact. I thought that was kind of peculiar. Most of them are nice letters.

I got a lot of letters on "A Spanish Lesson," which made me feel good, about the moral. I was really

impressed by that, because people actually felt good about that. I made this really dumb, kind of hippy statement at the end of this story, like I am moralistic...

SA'ADAH: *At the same time, we were talking about that story before, and what you're saying, though, is that statement is pretty much an accurate assesment of what you believe.*

SHEPARD: Yeah. I was putting myself down. But yeah, it is. It's not very chic to be committed these days.

You point out to people that, hey, it's time. Diseases are outnumbering God, and here comes the big black thing to take a bite out of the moon. You say that to people and they say: "Gee, yawn, boring." I mean, so what? The West is in decline. Let's go to the club, let's get high.

That's New York. That's a lot of New York stuff right there. I find myself at parties in New York City, and all of a sudden I wax impassioned about something, which may be foolish. These people come up and say, who's he? Dear me. He's opinionated, isn't he? So that makes me wonder about it all.

So it made me feel good that people were actually out there committed. I got a couple of letters from people who were working in different kinds of human projects, like working with poor people or homeless people or nuclear stuff, who were really beat down by all the shit they have to go through every day. The sheer bureaucratic snarl. And they said that my story made them feel good, and that made me feel good. I don't get that kind of letter a lot, but it's neat.

I don't go to conventions very much. I've given one reading and I got a nice response on that.

SA'ADAH: *Where was that?*

SHEPARD: That was at Boskone a

couple of years ago. Everybody really liked the reading, and there was a lot of applause and it was all packed and everything, so that made me feel good.

SA'ADAH: *Do you anticipate becoming a household name in the near future?*

SHEPARD: I envision making a living. I hope. If I can make a little more money than I make now, I'd be real happy. But anything's possible. Christ, the opposite, too. But I'm not putting anything on that. A lot depends on just how much I do, how well I do. So if that is all it depends on, I don't think I'm going to be one of these mute inglorious Miltons. I have a lot of hooks in my writing. People can get through all the writerly stuff and just deal with the hooks, even people who don't like to read that much.

I have a friend who's a redneck carpenter and he really likes my stuff. That makes me feel great. Because he doesn't read too much above the level of James Michener, late James Michener. It makes me feel good that he liked it, and he wouldn't tell me if he didn't, because he's a real plain-spoken cracker: "Ah can't do this one, Loosh." So it wouldn't be any kind of jive.

So if I can communicate on that kind of broad band, then I'll probably be all right. I'll probably make a living.

There are some marvelous writers in this country who are making \$1500 dollar advances. Nicholas Delbanco is a mainstream writer who's a marvelous fucking writer. He's written ten or twelve books... I don't know what his advances are, but I know that for his first seven or eight books he was making shit.

SA'ADAH: *Any particular title he's written...?*

SHEPARD: The Sherbrookes trilogy.

"The problem with [writing about] rock'n-roll for me always has been that I knew too much about it. I knew too much of the milieu."

Three novels. I can't remember what they are, but that's his main work. He is just a really lovely writer. And he's no more esoteric than somebody like Louise Erdrich, who is now whopping down \$500,000 advances. But boy, she earns out. Wow, that's amazing that she does. I can't see her having this tremendous broad appeal, at least off *Love Medicine*. I haven't read *The Beet Queen*.

SA'ADAH: *She's actually selling books.*

SHEPARD: I'm sure she is. That's amazing.

SA'ADAH: *At least in the urban market, anyway.*

SHEPARD: But Delbanco writes really beautifully crafted books. They're real quiet, and they don't have big hooks, and they don't have anything that's going to pull you in except they're really neat stories. He's doomed until he decides to crap out on what he does best. I hope he doesn't. I hope he does, too, so he can make some damn money. So he's got to do teaching gigs and all that shit. From all reports, he's not a particularly academic sort, so it can't be pleasant. Because I know I don't like academics. But it's the

fates. How it works, if Nicolas Delbanco won the National Book Award, maybe he'd be where Louise Erdrich is now. But he didn't. So he's making dogshit.

SA'ADAH: *This is a sort of inevitable question. It ties in a little bit with what you were saying about other writers. I am interested in what other writers that you find interesting. What kind of stuff is really turning you on.*

SHEPARD: Jeez. Lots. I'm not reading right now, much.

SA'ADAH: *Do you not read while you write? While you're in the process of writing, do you try to avoid reading?*

SHEPARD: No, not really. If I did that, I would never read. In science fiction, I haven't been reading a whole lot. Of the novels. So I really don't know. If somebody sends me a novel, I try to read it. I guess my favorite writer is Yukio Mishima. I don't write anything like him, but I like his stuff a whole lot.

SA'ADAH: *Would you describe yourself as an eclectic reader?*

SHEPARD: Yeah. I like Joseph, uh, what's that guy's name? A Polish guy, ah shit. Brodsky?

SA'ADAH: *Harold Brodsky?*

SHEPARD: No, that's an American guy. This is a guy who wrote a book called *Bass Saxophone*, Josef Skvorecky. I like him a lot. Weird writers like that.

There's a Polish writer named Thadeus Konwicki I like. American writers, I really admire William Kennedy.

I like early Jayne Ann Phillips. I didn't like *Machine Dreams*, but I liked her grotesque short fiction. I thought that was terrific.

There's a writer named Francisco Goldman I like. He's not done anything but short fiction, as yet, published a couple of things in *Esquire*. Russell Banks. I like



J.K. Potter's illustration for "The End of Life As We Know It" from *The Jaguar Hunter* collection.

Russell Banks' work.

In science fiction, the people I will read are like Kim Stanley Robinson, William Gibson. I will read William Gibson. That's what I will look for. To see what they're doing. I probably would read stuff by Jack Dann if he had anything out. But his book is in limbo now.

SA'ADAH: *The last thing he had was The Man Who Melted.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, but he's got another book, and it's sitting right there called *Counting Coup* that nobody's... It got caught in the Bluejay thing.

SA'ADAH: *That's one thing I wanted to touch on. We're going to get to this in a little bit, about the stuff that you're working on. You've already touched on a tremendous amount of titles of works in progress, works that have been written and not published, which I'm sure is fascinating to people that have been following your work.*

In the preface to one of your stories in the Year's Best Science Fiction, Gardner Dozois' anthology, you mentioned a couple of books. Weeping Woman, Berkley, and Foreign Devils, Tor Books, as well as Psiderweb...

SHEPARD: Okay. *Psiderweb* is *Life During Wartime*. *Foreign Devils* was the Vietnam book that I talked about. It was a great idea.

SA'ADAH: *Which you bailed out on.*

SHEPARD: Yeah. *The Weeping Woman* was... I got real pissed at Berkley. I just found a lot of stuff that happened to *Green Eyes*, like it was being illegally sold overseas, and right after reviews came out it was left off the backlist. I was sitting down there, my mother was dying in Florida, and I was getting these letters from Berkley saying, gee, we all love you, too bad it's not doing well. Nobody could order the goddamn thing. I got really pissed off at them, there were other

things too. So I just didn't want to give it to them... So the book is in limbo.

SA'ADAH: *From the present day, what are we looking at in terms of what's going to be coming out in the near future, stuff that's already been sold?*

SHEPARD: Well, I've got a book due. I'll turn it in this summer to Bantam, but I'm not sure which one of these three it will be.

I was going to do a book called *The Man Who Painted The Dragon Griaule*. They said, okay, we want to establish you as a writer who can write in both mainstream and science fiction. So I said, well, if you want to do that, then why should I do a dragon book? I wouldn't mind writing the dragon book next. But, I said, if you want to establish me as a mainstream writer, I think that maybe it would be wise for me to do a mainstream book.

SA'ADAH: *Was it their idea to expand the short story "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule," or was that your suggestion?*

SHEPARD: "The Man Who Painted The Dragon Griaule" was a story I conceived of at Clarion, as a novel. I didn't write it, but I got all this bloody research, like from painters and stuff, this really neat stuff. I was going to write a novel, and I figured it would be a huge novel for me at that time, 700 pages. Then I said, well no, I can't write the novel. So I compressed it down to a novelette. Then I said, gee, this could work as a novel. So that was always on my mind to write. That was on a contract--after *Life During Wartime*.

But my feeling was that if they really wanted to establish me as a writer who could go both ways, who could cross over, that I should probably not do that next. Wait a while. Then, say, if I had some kind of reputation in both fields,

"I don't have any problem with good or bad reviews. But I really like getting an intelligent review."

then I could come back later on, and all the science fiction critics could say, well here's a nice fantasy book, and all the mainstream critics could say, isn't this clever, he's written a novel about a dragon. It's like the Emperor's New Clothes. That was just a strategy, I guess. They seemed to think that was wise.

So the book I'm turning in next likely will be mainstream, but with fantasy elements.

SA'ADAH: *As yet unfinished.*

SHEPARD: Yeah.

SA'ADAH: *Are you superstitious about talking about work in progress?*

SHEPARD: No.

SA'ADAH: *Some people are, so I thought I'd ask before we started getting the plots of all your novels yet to be written here.*

SHEPARD: Oh. You want that?

SA'ADAH: *For my own selfish purposes.*

SHEPARD: *The End Of Life As We Know It* is the story about a nineteen year old kid who runs away, he's a street kid.

It starts out with a section called "Kung Fu Hillbillies." You know, [singing]: "Come listen to my story of a man named Rich, he's got a common-law wife and an eighteen year old bitch." It's a song this guy writes, it's called "The Kung Fu Hillbillies."

This kid ran away from home when he was fourteen. He ran from Florida to L.A., which I almost did. So this is semi-autobiographical up to that point. He survives on the street for two and a half to three years, somehow, which is a good long time to survive on the street, but it's been done, I guess. I don't know how long other people have. Most people don't seem to have that long an experience, from people I've talked to in Seattle.

Then he gets taken in by this Cadillac dealer, who kind of gives him a home. The guy's gay. He's a real friendly guy, a real nice guy, but he's not coming on to the protagonist. Finally he does. He gets a little hinky there. And the kid runs away again. In the meantime he's picked up an education, a lot of it in electronics and stuff like that.

So he goes to Seattle. He doesn't know what the fuck he's doing, but he has this idea he's going to build a laser. This real street kid kind of ambition. I'm going to build a laser and scar the Washington Monument, this kind of shit. Or draw a moustache on Mt. Rushmore.

He falls in with this couple named Joe and Elaine who are burglars, and does that for a while.

He ends up finally going out-side and staying with this kind of weird survivalist group, who he calls the Kung Fu Hillbilles. Which is led by this guy Richard. And Richard is this redhaired guy, no teeth hardly. He's got all these women hanging around, sleazoid women, bums, and they live out in this...

It doesn't look like a real going concern. They've got the rusted big gas cans full of baked beans and shit like this. They're supposed to have this hideout up in the Cascades, which is set for this marvelous existence after the shit-storm comes, and after the shitstorm comes, Richard will be king. This is the theory. They want the kid for



Like this photograph, details about Shepard's life are often fuzzy.



Another illustration from *The Jaguar Hunter*, "Salvador."

their Merlin, because he's got all this electronic ability.

Anyway, he goes out there and he figures what the hell, he's smarter than all these people. He can deal with them, even though they're all fucking martial artists. So it gets a little weird there. I won't go through all the kinds of sexual trips that blow him out of there. They don't want to let him go.

Meanwhile, he's been telling them all about the apocalypse. Richard has visions. He tells them all about his visions. How, when it comes, they ain't gonna warn anybody, it's just gonna happen. There ain't gonna be nothing on the radio or TV.

Then what this kid does, is he decides to Orson Welles them, and create a fake apocalypse, and then get out in the confusion. Now this is a really dumb plan. And he knows this afterwards. But he's just so taken with the idea that he's smarter than they are, he wants to really fuck 'em up, man.

He builds this thing that picks up the SAC base at McCord Air Force Base, and takes it off old World War III movies, all this bullshit. And he deals up the car radio, so after about four hours it's gonna go whp-eeeeee. He does all this fucking stuff with the radios, sets it up really good.

They're not going to hit any towns much, anyway, but even so nobody's going to get any warning. So Richard is covered in this.

So anyway, it comes down, and he scoots out the door, they catch him, off they go, into this mountain valley. It's late fall, it's about ready to get snowed in. Part of their party gets stopped by the cops and never makes it. We don't know what happens to them. They're just off the story.

It ends up there's just him and Richard and these two women. They hide the car, they go down in this valley, it's a three day walk. They get there and there's this yuppie

family who all of a sudden sees Charles Manson, and say, Well, we'll be going. And Richard says, what for? There's nothing to go to.

SA'ADAH: *Richard thinks there is an apocalypse.*

SHEPARD: He believes it. Everybody believes it. So there they are, with these weird Indians in this valley, snowed in, everybody thinking the world has ended. So that's really where the story takes off. Beyond that, the plot defies explanation. It's real simple, it's just what happens from that point.

There is a kind of a counter-plot. The Indians are very strange.

Years before they had been visited by this sort of hippy named James, who had come to them and changed their lives with this prophecy. And James said that he came there because this is the only place in the world where what he said was true. Back in the city, what he said was a lie, but here it's the truth. So they're living by his words, and they never write them down, because James said that if you write them down then they get to be lies, so you have to let them change and grow. So they're saying all this weird shit, James said this and James said that.

Among the things that he advised them was that three was a basic family unit. Like two men and a woman or two women and a man. That was the basic nucleus for any family. So they're always experimenting with that. They don't think he's right about this. They've figured out that this might be a problem.

Then they have this thing called the real world, which is what they call this mountain that looms up over the valley. The name in Indian language means the real world. That's this place that they think James went to. So there's a kind of fantasy element to that, but it's not real stated. It's not like, well we don't have adventures in

"I hear all these news-men say isn't it wonderful how we're all having a robust dialogue on Vietnam. What jive! What a jerkoff thing to say."

the real world. What we have are possible mystical applications here, and all kinds of weirdness.

There's a kind of a battle, a strange weird battle fought between two of James' disciples essentially, and Richard, who is actually becoming a king, a good one. He never becomes less than a mean prick, but he's a damn good king.

It's just a resolution of character. The plot is essentially a resolution of all these characters mixed together.

I'm really pleased with it, how it's going so far. It's a first person narration.

SA'ADAH: *I'm trying to think if you've used first person narration.*

SHEPARD: In short fiction, "A Spanish Lesson" and "Traveler's Tale."

Another book is called *Mister Right*, and it's a rock'n'roll novel.

SA'ADAH: *Great. That ties in with a question I wanted to ask you. As a musician, very little of what you've written so far has really had much to do with music. I was curious about that. We've had a couple of characters who were musicians, "Dancing It All Away At Nadoka." Nothing really...*

SHEPARD: The problem with rock'n'roll for me always has been that I knew too much about it. I knew too much of the milieu. It was really a problem. I'd start writing something, and I'd find that I was writing all this stuff that no one wants to know. I would just get bogged down in detail every time I try to write a story about it.

So finally, I guess I've forgotten all this stuff, something like that, or at least gotten it into focus more, to where I know what I want to say about rock'n'roll. The book is about obsessive love and rock'n'roll. It's a real sexual book. It's about a band called Mister Right.

Basically it's the story of the lead singer, the bassist named Taylor Wright. He, ten years before, had been working for this guy named Steve Merdeka who owned a silk screen business. He helped him set it up, helped him sell big orders to Sears and get big and start making some real bucks, and then Merdeka screwed him. He was going to make him part of the company, and fucked him over.

Now Merdeka has gone on to become this money man. He is like hot. He is just like one of these people, everything works. Chancy investments pay off, just improbable times and places conjoin and he makes more money. He's gone into the entertainment business and become this sort of godfather of rock'n'roll.

So ten years later, he comes back to settle his debt with Taylor by taking over his band, which is pretty near a guarantee of success. Merdeka is deranged. In ten years he has totally dissipated. The book documents his decline into madness, into just seriously falling apart.

It's really complicated in the sense that the book has a lot to do with roles and disguises and people trying to get out of doing one thing that they're doing, and not being able to, and then doing it in this very circuitous way.

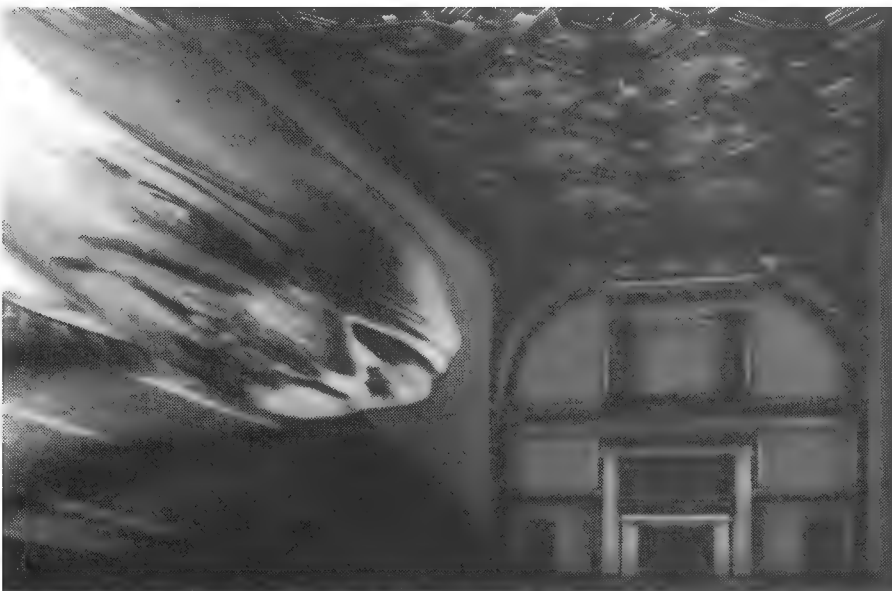


In one of the first chapters in the book, Elvis Presley is introduced, this guy who looks like Elvis Presley as he would be today, and who makes a very strong case for being Elvis Presley, that he split a long time before, and that it was a double who died. He lives now comfortably in Northern Michigan, up in the woods, pickin' and singin' with his little wife and his dog, and all that stuff. It's incredibly convincing. He has the persona and the mannerisms, everything. He has a story that's so nifty that you can't poke a hole in it. It could absolutely be true. That's the kind of thing that the novel is about, just these kind of strange roles that people adopt.

SA'ADAH: *How does that relate to your experience in rock'n'roll?*

SHEPARD: In essence, mine was a role of playing rock'n'roll. I was avoiding being someone I wanted to be. I was avoiding being a writer. Like your guy Ulmer, he says that was a good way of not having to make a living, have a real job. It was the same way for me. I was avoiding. It's different with Ulmer, because that obviously is his real job. That is what he does. But with me, it was faking myself out. I was saying, do this, be this. Maybe I could have, but it would have still ended up here somewhere, writing again.

But that's really a small relationship to the book. The book is much more deranged than that. We have Taylor's girl friend as a part of it, this woman named Katie who has been through this terrible love affair with a married man. At the same time she was trying to complete a doctorate at Michigan University, and the pressure really blew her head out. She didn't go nuts, but she has kind of this breakdown, and now she's fallen in love with this rock'n'roll singer and she's scared shitless, like I'm losing another one. Because she really



J.K. Potter's illustrations for "A Traveler's Tale" and "Mengele."

J.K. Potter

took the bite. She got obsessed.

Then there's this kind of strange cop named Dan Hoddingman, who's the other major character. I guess those are the four major characters.

Oh yeah, this woman comes in to one of the stories I'm writing called the Queen Mother, a rock'n'roll singer called the Queen Mother.

SA'ADAH: *This is a separate set of stories.*

SHEPARD: Yeah, but she's in the book, too. I just liked her a lot, so I wanted to write these stories.

The story is really complex. Taylor has this guy calling him. He calls himself Mister Right. He calls him on the telephone and talks to him about his life. And Taylor doesn't have anybody else to talk to, really.

SA'ADAH: *He doesn't have any idea who this person is?*

SHEPARD: No. At first he reacts like you would to any geek, hang up and stuff. But eventually the guy starts saying stuff that starts making sense to him. It's kind of interesting. He's kind of entertaining. This is another element of the book that's going on.

Then Merdeka has this theme park he's building, called Rock Island, where he's going to recreate the sixties and the fifties, and have a tomorrowland that features, among other things, David Bowie's tomb, which is pharaonic in scope.

It's an interplay of characters, what's going on. There's a couple of murders, women found dead with barbiturate overdoses with Mister Right's business card, the man's business card, nearby. We're wondering who's doing it. Is it Katie trying to poison the milieu, because the band is a threat to her? Or is it Merdeka? Is it Taylor, is it the crazy cop? Who the fuck is it?

In that way, it's a kind of a thriller. But it's not written like a

“My father beat a classical education into me pretty much, I mean literally beat it into me—to the extent that I can still quote, to everyone else’s unending boredom, major sections of this shit.”

thriller, it's written like more of a... It's really a lot about rock'n'roll. A lot of really bad shit about rock'n'roll. That's really more of the focus than what's going on.

SA'ADAH: *As you've said, this stuff has been percolating for a while. You haven't written about a lot of music experiences. Was this a sort of a release, being able to write about it?*

SHEPARD: Yeah, yeah. It's a lot of fun. I've always wanted to write a book about rock'n'roll that didn't detail the rise and fall of something, or the band trying to make it. Here's a band, a scummy bar band, who might make it. But that's not the real story. The story's basically about indentities, about what rock'n'roll kind of is to these people.

To me, what rock'n'roll is, is a bar band. Rock'n'roll is not this Homeboy Jesus and his Blue-Collar Poetics, like Springsteen, or this

quasi-metal crap, like these guys up there talking about evil and going home to their beers and their three kids. That becomes so inflated that it becomes this vast impotency, and it's meaningless. It isn't really rock'n'roll.

What rock'n'roll is, is when you're playing in Kalamazoo, and you're playing in these little burnout bars, that's where it's really happening. What this whole story about rock'n'roll is people going and having nothing else to do on a nothing night. So they go and they become part of this thing called rock'n'roll. It doesn't have anything to do with the mass media Macy's Parade images of the entertainers.

I mean, Springsteen, he's too big now to have any meaning. All his songs of anguish went for his swimming pools. They lose credence. As nice a guy as he may be, and as sincere as he is, that's the facts.

Where it's all going down, what rock'n'roll lives with, what it crawls out of, is all this shit going down on the scum level. I think nobody knows how terribly bizarre that is, that whole life. Just the kind of women you meet, for instance, there're some real funny women, just the kind of people and events that occur. I don't think anybody really has a comprehension.

It's really a rich vein of American life that nobody's really documented in any serious way. There's been a few attempts at punk novels, and stuff like that. But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about your basic working band.

SA'ADAH: *There certainly haven't been any great rock'n'roll novels.*

SHEPARD: This may not be it either. ●

Rafael Sa'adah is a twenty-five year old truck driver living in Washington, DC.

LIFE DURING WARTIME by Lucius Shepard,
Bantam, Oct. 1987, \$8.95, Paperback

Reviewed by Rafael Sa'adah

Lucius Shepard is a writer with a dazzling control of language, a fertile imagination, and a playful willingness to experiment with form. Unfortunately those three attributes are working at cross purposes in his new novel, *Life During Wartime*. The book is an expansion of Shepard's Nebula winning novella "R & R," published in *IASFM* in April 1986. Few stories had as much impact on the SF field last year as did the Nebula-winning "R & R," part of a series of stories which also included "Salvador" and "Fire Zone Emerald." Taken together, these stories painted a frighteningly realistic portrait of a near-future war in Central America. "R & R" in particular excited many with its finely etched portrait of David Mingolla, a young American soldier struggling to keep his sanity in the midst of a conflict he does not understand.

Life During Wartime, however, negotiates a very different mental geography than the realistic combat stories that preceded it. Although the book opens with "R & R" as the first section, the journey David Mingolla takes abruptly shifts modes.

In the second section, titled "The Good Soldier," we find Mingolla on the island of Roatan just off the coast of Honduras. We are less than a year removed from the events of "R & R." Mingolla has joined PsiCorps, the army's shadowy intelligence service, and has undergone five months of drug therapy to augment his psi powers. He has also undergone plastic surgery to make him appear more like the Central American population he will infiltrate. Unfortunately we are given no explanation as to why Mingolla has chosen to join Psi

corps and undergo this radical treatment, nor is any forthcoming.

As Mingolla begins to discover and harness his tremendous psychic abilities he also begins to assert his will against his PsiCorps handlers and question the missions he is being sent on. He finally cuts loose and escapes to seek out the truth of the conflict he is engaged in. His companion on this journey is Debora, the Honduran woman from "R & R" who had urged him to desert to Panama. Debora is Mingolla's "opposite number" from Sombra, the communist psicorps. Their journey through the jungle towards Panama is the heart of the book.

While the plot of *Life During Wartime* is based on the assumption that the war in Central America is only a manifestation of an older psychic conflict, resolution of this does not seem to be Shepard's main intent. Shepard drops hints of the true nature of the conflict throughout the book and even, in a bizarre set of flash-forwards that Mingolla experiences during a psychic trance, seems to reveal events beyond the ending of the book proper.

Instead the focus of the story seems to be the partnership forged between Mingolla and Debora. Shepard is at his best in his evocation of Mingolla and Debora's psychic and erotic duels with each other. At the end of the book they are seen marching off together to carry on their conflict with the forces attempting to control them. Having found their focus through each other, their anger, their "purity of intent" as Shepard describes it, becomes the point of the book. It is the sort of moral Shepard is adept at making work on the minimalist canvas of the short story, but on the larger frame of this novel the events of Mingolla and Debora's

journey seem to be little more than a travelogue, an overlong (albeit entertaining at times) way to make a point.

Even more troubling is that the character of Debora is never really engaged. Her lack of meaningful exposition and her barely realized leftist philosophy make her seem merely a cypher, a foil for Mingolla's development. For one whose importance to the book is as strong as hers, she seems not to have merited much in the way of illumination.

At the core of "R & R" was the character of David Mingolla, a young soldier uprooted from his home and trying to survive in a new reality. Despite the SF trappings of that story both the character and the milieu were familiar to us--American troops in a Third World country playing out a conflict beyond their control. Vietnam looms like a green shadow throughout. *Life During Wartime* expands on this conflict, but turns it into a battle of psychic dimensions, not political or physical ones.

The jarring transition between the opening segment "R & R" and the rest of the novel is at the heart of why this book does not work for this reader. Both the character of Mingolla and the Central American war lose their grounding in historical reality and become a backdrop for a fantasy conflict that tells us little about ourselves and little more about the author. In the course of the journey Mingolla makes from confused American soldier to psychic superman he loses his humanity. Thus losing in the process what made "R & R" a moving and powerful story and makes *Life During Wartime* merely an interesting one.

JERRY'S NEIGHBORS

A Report From Lynchburg, VA.

BY RUDY RUCKER



This all started back in 1980. I was in Heidelberg at the time, writing science fiction and living off a mathematics grant from the German government. The grant was running out, and the only job I could get back in the US was teaching math at a women's college in Lynchburg, Virginia. I had a vision of a county courthouse, a public square, trees, drinking, party boys, hot women with drawls. At this point I'd never heard of Jerry, but the sound of "Lynchburg" was a bit...troubling. I wondered if I should go.

The only older relative around to consult with was my ninety-year-old German grandmother. "Lynchburg," she said thoughtfully. "It's

called that because in the old days bad people had to live there, and anyone who wanted to was allowed to shoot them. Pow!" She cackled and pretended to aim a gun. She was getting old.

"Grandma, that's all wrong. Anyway, it's the only job I've been offered. I've got to move back to America."

A week later I came home from my office at the Mathematics Institut to find my wife looking at a copy of *Life* magazine.

"Look at this, Rudy. Your brother sent it. It's an article about this awful man called Jerry Falwell who lives in Lynchburg." I looked over her shoulder. There was a picture of a fat man in a three-piece

suit. Praying on his knees. Nice *Life* photography, with shadows and wrinkles but...the guy was clearly some kind of evil demagogue. On the next page he was driving an ATV three-wheeler, chasing one of his guards around his walled estate.

"I don't believe this." My visions of checkers and whiskey in the courthouse park went up in flames. I saw a city of angry robots, pointing out my sins. Jerry denouncing me from the pulpit. The annual Full Gospel Hog Roast, with me on the spit. "I don't believe this is the only job I can get."

The people in Lynchburg looked really strange. The women especially. There were all these fifty-yearold women in lime-green

skirts and pink alligator shirts. I couldn't figure out if it was time-warp or space-warp: on the one hand I'd been out of America for the last two horrible years of the Seventies; on the other hand, I'd never lived in a small town in southern Virginia. Turned out it was a little of both.

"Preppy," my ten-year-old daughter told me, after her first week of school. "I want to look preppy. That's what's in, Dad. I want an alligator shirt and a pink corduroy skirt."

"Are you kidding me? That stuff went out in the Fifties. I didn't march on the Pentagon so my children could be *preppy*."

"You don't know anything, Daddy. You're *groovy*."

So the people were preps, but so far I didn't see any angry robots. Socially, at least. The week after we bought our house, representatives of four or five sects came by to try and sign me up. Robots for sure, but not angry...though who knew what lurked inside those bulging bibles. I heard stories about Jerry Falwell's church sending out guys in vans to drive children to Sunday School. A woman wrote the paper about it. She said the van-drivers had lured her children off by promising them snacks and games. A girl from Jerry's college, Liberty Baptist College, a.k.a. LBC, accosted my daughter at a bus-stop, asking her if she was saved, and if she loved Jesus, and where she'd go if she *died right now*.

I signed my family up at the Episcopal church. My fellow college-teachers thought I was nuts to go to church at all, but I figured it was better to have a cover. Anyway, I like church. I believe in God, and even if I don't agree with all the details, it's nice, every few weeks, to sit in a church and have nobody talking about money.

Except at Thomas Roads. Every weekend the paper had a big

ad for Thomas Roads Baptist Church, with a picture of "Doctor" Falwell. As a writer, I felt it was incumbent on me to go check the service out. I took my wife and the three kids. My wife kept telling the kids not to give out their names, "or the van will come get you."

Actually the guys at the door were nice enough, maybe not quite Rotary Club material, but trying hard, smiling and flashing their glasses and not fluffing their lines even if I did have a strange look in my eyes.

The only odd treatment they gave us was to have a hard-looking guy in a trenchcoat follow me in and sit right in front of us, with his hand on a zipped-up leather bible case. I definitely didn't want him to undo that case and come out blazing. I made no sudden gestures.

The church is basically a theater, with a sloping floor and with seats radiating out from the stage. There are three or four heavy grey TV cameras mounted in the theater; each one has a red light on top that goes on when it's transmitting. Jerry and some other people walk around on the stage, and standing at the back of the stage is the choir.

There was one black person in the church. She was standing in the front row of the choir, right next to the Oriental woman. The odd thing about the choir was that they didn't really sing. When it was time for a song, a tape-recording would come on, and the choir would lip-synch it. Control, control, everything under control.

Jerry talked about all the people who want to stop his ministry. The drug-pushers, the communists, the homosexuals, the abortionists, and the pornographers. I tried to look inconspicuous.

Jerry talked on and on, stressing the point that *they* were against *us*, making the world outside his theater sound vicious and scary. He referred to the service as "this

program," and sometimes he broke for a commercial. One of the commercials was for a copy of the entire Bible printed on a microfiche, a little square of plastic.

"It's a good tool for...*soul-winning*," smiled Jerry. "A good way to...start a conversation." I found myself really wanting a whole bible printed the size of a postage stamp. How big would the letters be? Could you actually read it with a microscope? And it was *free*, although you were certainly urged to include a prayer offering.

Several times, while the TV stations were running their own commercials, the choir would lip-synch a song or two, and some men would go around and take collection. That impressed my children, the way Jerry took collection over and over, like a parking meter.

The thing that really got me was that there was no gospel and no prayers. At one point Jerry did open up a bible, and he started in on reading a lesson, but after a verse or two he broke off and said, "Friends, why don't I just summarize this for you; summarize it and share some of my insights with you."

"He can't stand to read it because it isn't something he wrote," my wife whispered to me.

The people in the audience looked just like you'd expect, only more beat up. Honest working people with bad luck and no money. Maybe a drunk in the family, maybe a druggie, maybe a daughter knocked up. Payments behind on everything, the bank wanting to take back the car, no money to go to the doctor and get those lumps checked. If any people needed God's grace, it was these folks right here. And still no prayers; still no Holy Spirit! Then, finally, almost at the end, it came.

"Friends," said Jerry, bowing his head, "Close your eyes and let's join in a moment of prayer." All right! "As you know, our enemies

are trying to get this program off the air." Huh? "We're close to bankruptcy, Lord." Then how'd you get so sleek and fat, man? "If we don't get two million dollars by next month, our television ministry must cease. Two million dollars, Lord, two million dollars by next month. Amen."

All those people there, plenty of them hurt and needing something, and all Jerry Falwell could think to help them pray for was two more millions of dollars for himself. Unreal.

In the long run it gets tiring. Just when you think Falwell can never get any more wrong-headed, he tops himself and gets another run in the press. His broadcasts supporting the "Peacekeeper" missile. His circus trial against Larry Flynt. His this, his that. You mostly just live with it. The South is weird. I have a theory, for instance, that Jimmy Carter had the CIA shoot Flynt for having printed a picture of Jimmy's sister, the evangelist Ruth Stapledon. Shortly after the highly publicized plane ride during which Ruth "saved" Flynt, there was an issue of *Hustler* that said, "Inside: Ruth Stapledon Shows Pink" on the cover. The issue was shrink-wrapped, and I didn't buy it, so I'm not sure what kind of picture of the President's sister it was. But a month later, Flynt was shot in the pelvis while traveling in Georgia. Very little effort was made to find the sniper. Is Larry Flynt the Martin Luther King of the Eighties? Is Jerry Hitler?

By almost any objective standard, Jerry Falwell is a racist, a war-monger, and a fascist—but it's hard to make these charges stick. When cornered in an argument, Jerry starts talking about America and God, and he gets that little smile in the corners of his mouth, and people begin to feel that...well, at least he's *sincere*. The *sincerity* seems to have a life independent of what he

is saying. I often get the feeling that Jerry doesn't really care what he is saying at all—he simply picks as outrageous a position as possible, a position guaranteed to draw news coverage, and then he slathers his oily *sincerity* all over the cameras.

There was one black person in the church. She was standing in the front row of the choir, right next to the Oriental woman.

A corollary of having *sincerity* be his main stock in trade is that Jerry does appear to be moral and honest in his personal life. His various organizations pull in a lot of money, but it wouldn't be accurate to say that Jerry is using religion to get rich. I doubt if he is very interested in the luxuries that wealth can bring. He's interested, rather, in being famous and powerful. The money his broadcasts make is spent on *more* broadcasts. His religion might best be thought of as a kind of non-malignant tumor. It draws in energy which is expended almost entirely on itself. Jerry Falwell raises money so he can afford bigger shows to raise more money.

If I speak of him as non-malignant, it is because, blessedly, he does not preach hatred. Evil as many of his ideas may be, you can't visualize Jerry Falwell delegating death-squads to wipe out his detractors. Demonstrators at his church are not beaten, and people who make fun of Jerry are not hounded out of Lynchburg. After Reagan's landslide re-election, a number of my old left-wing friends in other cities expressed a fear that "now

Jerry Falwell is going to run the country." "He's already supposed to run Lynchburg," I told them, "And people here think and say whatever they want to."

I know this for a fact, as the following story will demonstrate.

In April, 1984, the head of Jerry's Moral Majority organization was a man named Cal Thomas. (Cal has since stepped down to become a fulltime syndicated columnist.) As it happens, Cal Thomas lives about a block from me. I was going through a difficult period in my life just then—I was jobless and broke, I'd just finished writing *The Secret of Life*, which was supposed to be a great novel, and I had no idea what to write next. I was abusing substances, as the saying goes, and for some reason the fact that Cal lived so nearby was starting to rankle.

It was Friday. I went to the 7-11 to get another 12-pack. On the way back, I saw Cal there, mowing his lawn. I drove my car up on the sidewalk and jumped out and gave him the finger and yelled:

"Christ sent me here to take you and Jerry out!"

We got into a kind of discussion then. I said that I was a Christian myself, going to St. John's Episcopal, and I didn't like him and Falwell to be ripping off the true teachings of the Fightin' Christ.

"Did you learn to give the finger like that at St. John's?" sneered Cal, a tall guy with a mustache.

"No! I learned it from L S D!!!"

He wanted to know who I was—I repeated my name several times, and pointed out my house, its red roof visible down the hill.

"I'm the second most famous person in Lynchburg," I insisted, "And you don't take account of me!"

I ranted some more, then I went on home, and a little later I was walking over to a friend's house, carrying a shopping bag with beer in it. By then I'd forgotten about talking to Cal, if the truth be

told. But he hadn't forgotten about me. He was still mowing his lawn, and when he saw me go by he jerked, and turned off his mower and came over and said things to me. I don't remember exactly what. I asked him if he wanted some beer. He seemed more and more agitated. He wanted to know what I had in the bag I was carrying. I realized then that he was scared I was a psycho assassin. Naturally he would have some fears of this--the sleep of the wicked is uneasy--and I suppose my behavior struck him as dangerously unpredictable. He was sort of foaming at the mouth.

His wife came out to him from the front. She was pretty--dark, tall and vivacious.

"Gay," says Cal to her, "Gay, go in the house and get the gun."

I split fast.

Next day I still thought it was funny, but the day after that--Sunday--I was desperately scared and remorseful. *How much power do the god-pigs have?* is what I was asking myself. I wrote Cal a letter which was basically begging him not to have me assassinated:

Sunday, April 29, 1984

Dear Cal:

I do feel I owe you an apology for having bothered you Friday evening. Obviously, there are some issues on which you and I do not see eye to eye, but you certainly have a right to mow your lawn in peace. A neighborhood is a neighborhood. I promise not to repeat my performance, and I hope that, in the long run, we will be on good terms with each other. You are clearly a man of patience and intelligence, and I really regret having acted the way I did. Here's one of my books--which may or may not interes. you--if you get around to it, please send me one of yours.

All the best,

Rudy Rucker

I put the letter inside a copy of *Infinity and the Mind*--not *Sex Sphere*, for God's sake, and set it by his door. I was nervous doing this, as Friday he'd intimated that he'd kill me if I ever stepped on his property again. But I had to get it delivered right away, before the final order to the God-Squad went down!

I said I was Christian myself, and I didn't like him and Falwell to be ripping off the true teachings of the Fightin' Christ.

I hadn't told anyone yet about all this, but now my wife, noticing my furrowed brow, asked what was up. I told her about giving Cal the finger and telling him that everyone in Lynchburg hates him and Jerry.

"Boy, you're stupid, Rudy."

A few days later I got a letter back from Cal:

May 3, 1984

Dear Rudy:

Thank you for your gracious note and the book. I appreciate the spirit in which you wrote the letter.

I must say that this was the most unique introduction I have ever received to anyone!

Enclosed are a couple of my recent newspaper columns. I am now writing for the Los Angeles Times Syndicate. I'll give you a copy of my book, Book Burning, when I get a chance.

Again, thanks for your note.

Sincerely,

Cal, "Vice Ayatollah"

Which was a real load off my mind. Before the letter, I'd reached the point of paranoia where I was wondering if it wouldn't be wise to go ahead and firebomb Cal before Jerry's minions could burn down my house and have the police shoot us as we ran out screaming. But this really *isn't* El Salvador here.

Cal's letter is quite classy--it's kind of unnerving, the fact that when you actually get to some one super media pig, there is sometimes actually a person there, a person who wears a certain kind of public mask. Not that I particularly like Cal now, or believe anything he writes--but it is interesting to know that he has a certain sense of humor about having worked as Jerry's "Vice Ayatollah."

I was talking to my friend Rich Jones, the assistant minister of St. John's Episcopal, a few months later, and he said, "Rudy, your name came up the other day in a very strange context. I was talking to Cal Thomas about a student exchange program, and he asked me if I knew you. I said, yes, and then Cal told me that you'd flipped him the bird and told him that Jesus sent you here to fight him, and that everyone at St. John's hates him."

"Well, yeah, Rich, I did that. It's true. I was pretty drunk."

"Cal asked me if you might have been drinking. I said that it was... possible."

"Was he pissed off?"

"It was more that he wanted to figure out...what had happened."

It's still a free country, even in Lynchburg, Virginia, and what's happening will never be entirely clear. ●

Rudy Rucker is the author of The Sex Sphere, Mathenauts (editor), Mind Tools: The Five Levels of Mathematical Reality and the forthcoming Wetware. He escaped from Lynchburg in 1986 for the fractal mental geometry of California.

Philip K. Dick

FRAGMENTS OF GENIUS



Philip K. Dick was one of SF's master storytellers and weavers of fantasy. His grasp of modern man's paranoia and sense of loss gave his fiction an edge that few others have equalled. He spent his life battling to preserve his visions and ended up being overtaken by them.

Success eluded Dick for most of his career and had just begun to find him upon his death in 1982. Ironically he has become more successful in death—as of July 1987, the paperback version of *Radio Free Albemuth* has spent several weeks on *The Washington Post* bestseller list. The mind boggles.

Dick Lupoff's interview, which begins on page 45, was conducted in November 1977 as research for Lupoff's introduction to the Gregg Press edition of *A Handful of Darkness*, and appears here for the first time. djs

INTRODUCTION

This plot outline for an unwritten book was drafted by Philip K. Dick on August 4, 1980, several months after he completed *The Divine Invasion*, and before he began work on *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. It may be considered an early form of Dick's outline for *The Owl in Daylight*, a science fiction novel he contracted to write at the same time he contracted to write *Timothy Archer*. No part of *Fawn*, *Look Back* or *The Owl in Daylight* was ever written, as far as we know. The asterisks in the outline replace names of people in Dick's life; their names have been removed to protect their privacy.

The editors of *Science Fiction EYE* have asked me to discuss the connection between the *Fawn*, *Look Back* outline and Dick's vast philosophical treatise which he called his Exegesis. In fact, this outline was written in the middle of a burst of writing on the voluminous notes (estimated to total two million words) that make up the Exegesis. On August 23, 1980, Dick typed an essay 62 pages long (18,000 words, almost one quarter the length of one of his novels!). This was an atypical period in the writing of the Exegesis; most of the entries are handwritten, and undated. On Sept. 2, 3 and 4, 1980, he typed another 57 pages. The bulk of the Exegesis is so large, and so unstructured (pagination generally starts again at page one with each new piece of writing), that we can't know for certain whether there might have been even more material written between these dates. Interestingly,

there are no obvious references in the Exegesis material immediately preceding and following the *Fawn* outline to the plot ideas contained in the outline. The thematic emphasis in the outline--the split between Dick's success as an artist and his failures with his wives and girlfriends, the conflicting emotions of loneliness in his love life and fulfillment in his intellectual and creative life--is one of many themes that recurs throughout the Exegesis, but not necessarily with any great emphasis in the 8/23/80 and 9/2/80 entries. Rather, we must speculate that Dick's 8/23/80 essay "cleared a space" in his thoughts and emotions and, perhaps, creative process, that made possible or inspired the outline he wrote the following day.

In general, in my opinion, Dick seldom made use of a written outline in writing a novel. He did write a fair number of outlines over the years, at least partly because they sometimes brought him money--the outline would be the basis on which a contract could be made with a publisher for an unwritten novel, and the contract would bring with it a partial advance on royalties. Many of these outlines were for novels that never got written, at least not in any form resembling the outline. Others were written after a part of the novel had already been written. My impression is that in many if not most cases, Dick had ideas about where a story would go (ideas he tended to keep in his head, rather than on paper), and these ideas would evolve and change as the book was written, with many of the most important plot developments in the book arising from the

writing in the course of the writing. There is a spontaneity to his fiction, an unpredictability. In spite of this, he does give the impression in his correspondance of believing, when he's working on an outline, that this is actually a description of the plot of the finished novel, this is what it will be like.

The Owl in Daylight, had Dick lived to write it, would almost certainly have been completely different from any of the various descriptions of it that he offered in correspondance, in conversation, and in the outline he used to sell the project. Those descriptions in turn differ hugely from each other--it is difficult to find a common thread between them. I identify *Fawn*, *Look Back* as an "early form" of *The Owl in Daylight* primarily because the plot seems an effort to project fictionally certain feelings and ideas Dick had about the three realms of Dante's *Commedia*; this same interest dominates Dick's description of *The Owl in Daylight* in his 6/29/81 letter to Gregg Rickman, published in Rickman's book *Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words*. On the other hand, the three realms are not noticeably present in Dick's four-page description of *The Owl in Daylight* in a letter to his agent on 1/30/81, and the plot described there has nothing in common with *Fawn* except that the female protagonist is named Jerda. Hmm.

In effect, these plot outlines and correspondances tell us what was on Dick's mind at this time in his life; *Fawn*, *Look Back* is almost a little fiction of the Borgesian type, complete in itself. What it isn't is a description of a novel

Philip K. Dick

BY PAUL WILLIAMS

Dick might actually have written, and neither are the *Owl* outlines, or *The Acts of Paul* [published as an insert included with the five-volume Underwood-Miller short story set], or any of the plot outlines Dick turned out in the two years between *Radio Free Albemuth* and *Valis*. Read it, then, not for what it might have been--Dick only wrote novels when he was actually writing a novel--but for what it is, what it communicates in and of itself. There is a sadness here, and a contentment, and a sort of yearning--a wish that life experience would resolve itself, would make sense (see Dick's "Letter to Joan" in the *PKDS Newsletter* #4), that in a novel everything could come clear and be resolved. Dick's readers know very well that this is not the way reality, when subjected to the blisteringly honest process that novel-writing was for Dick, actually functions. But that didn't stop Dick from yearning for it, from viewing the story before it is written with all the optimism of a lover at the start of a new relationship, never mind what happened the last dozen times I tried this.

Fawn, Look Back was originally titled *The Fawn Does Not Look Back*. The alteration was made by Dick in pen on the typed manuscript. ●

Paul Williams, Literary Executor for the Estate of Philip K. Dick, March, 1987. His latest book, *Remember Your Essence*, is published by Harmony Books

FAWN, LOOK BACK

BY PHILIP K. DICK

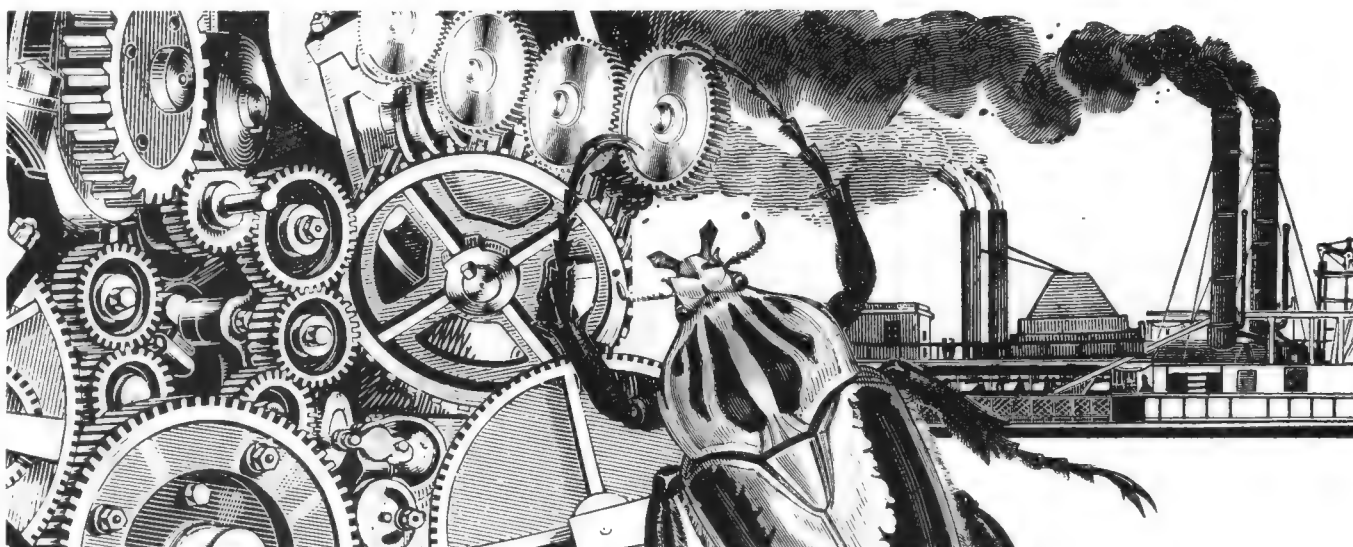
His name is Pflegebourne. Nasvar Pflegebourne.

He is very young when the book begins. He lives with his mother. He is in school. Most of his activities are solitary; he goes to the library and with fascination studies tapes showing genetic freaks spawned by the War, all of whom have either died out or have been destroyed. Then he gets a job with a firm that supplies visual effects (graphics) to accompany music presentations.

There are three realms/modes to the planet; he is still in the bottom one, Mode One. He goes to a female therapist. She tells him he must get into Mode Two (the social mode; what he has is incipient schizophrenia). He is set up with Eryns, an older woman, the idea being she will get him into the social interpersonal mode, since she gives parties. But very soon she drags him down to the hell layer, the bottom layer, the monster-to-monster layer, of Mode One.

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Philip H. Diet



Don Steffen

Then, in secret, he meets Jardi, a quiet bohemian girl who likes his graphics based on the genetic freaks. He has a secret relationship with her and enters Mode Two. He leaves Eryns; she physically attacks him. Since Jardi is quiet and gentle, Eryns destroys her, drives her into wildness and withdrawal. Eryns annihilates the relationship and gets him back (the therapist has never approved of the relationship with Jardi). But then he finds that Eryns doesn't want him back, now that she and the therapist have destroyed his relationship with Jardi. The therapist and Eryns become sexually involved with each other.

He is left alone. He finds himself unable to keep on at his job. He quits, devolves to a meager hand-to-mouth existence on a disability pension, no longer having any relationship with anyone, unable to work. He is completely in Mode One, now, which is to say, the schizophrenic process—called disbanding—is complete. He does nothing but go to the library and read, sit alone in his room and draw. He has lost his mother, his therapist, Eryns and Jardi—Jardi is afraid to see him because of her legitimate fear of bodily harm from Eryns. He keeps trying and failing to rise back up to Realm Two, the interpersonal realm. He has one friend left over from his job who is also showing signs of schizophrenia, or rather disbanding.

At the end he (the protagonist) is suddenly granted a vision of Mode Three, the peak mode, of the planet (the bottom mode, Mode One, is mechanical, an It, insect-like; Mode Two is masculine; Mode Three—glimpsed by few people—is feminine). He sees it briefly. Then, at the end,

one of his graphics is bought directly from him by the official media of the planet and as a result economic status is restored to him. The media sends people to talk to him. Because of Mode Three he is at last safely in Mode Two—due to his own efforts. Here the book ends.

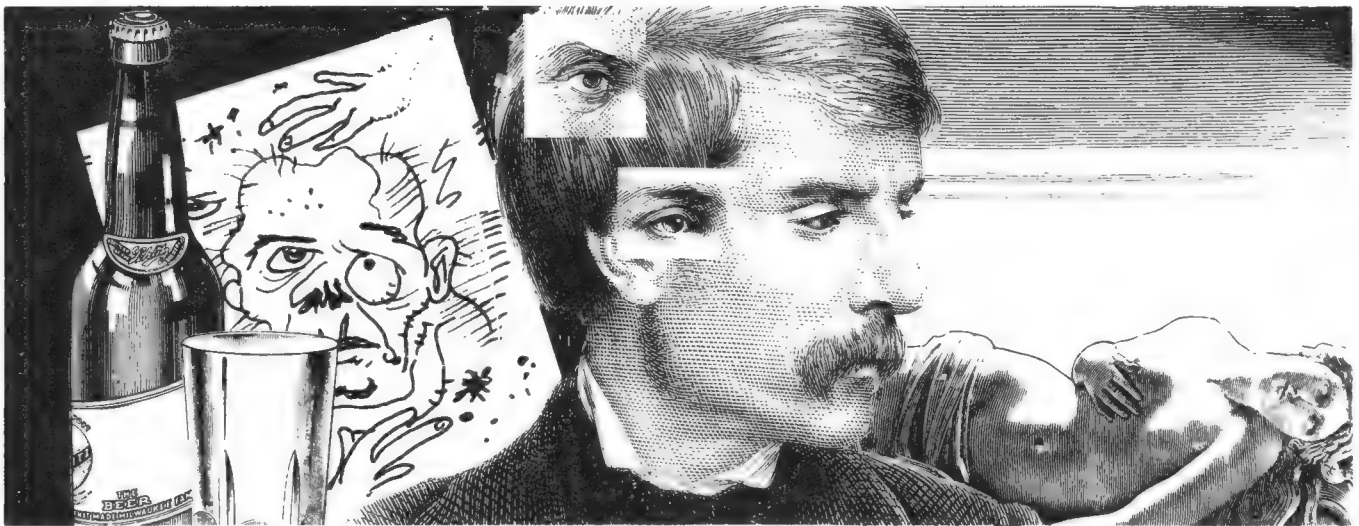
Eryns is based on *** and is a Harpy: retributive vengeance. Jardi is based on *** and is a dancer; she represents love and comfort. The therapist is based on *** and represents selfish reasoning. The friend is based on ***. The protagonist is myself. In Mode Three everything is connected and the computer, i.e. sentient basis of the planet, becomes visible; its life. The protagonist is psychologically very sick, but out of this comes a vision granted to few people. It heals him, but he will never recover from the damage done to him by Eryns. He is solitary and introspective, shut-in. He never recovers from this.

In Mode Three the planet/computer is now able to speak to him, since its real nature is disclosed. It tells him that it is storing his graphics in its permanent memory banks and wishes him to continue.

It was not known generally that the planet is a computer. He figures it out from his own experience with Mode Three; this is his secret. He draws (or tries to draw) what he saw when he saw Mode Three...but he can never capture the vision. However we see him continuing to try, although he knows he will fail.

So he has gone from sketching radiation freaks (vision of the horrible) to trying to sketch the beauty of Mode Three (the beatific vision, the top realm of Dante's *Commedia*).

Philip H. Dick



Don Sefton

It must be made clear that when he sees the planet in Mode Three he does not just see it in a better way; he sees it as it is (whether this is understood generally by the inhabitants or not. He understands it, upon experiencing it.)

In the library where he finds the graphics he finds books—tapes, cassettes, etc., floppy discs—about Earth, not Earth in the past, where they came from, but a planet which has been visited and contact made with; but it is far off. He sketches some of the life forms from Earth and wonders about them; to him they are exotic.

His planet is named Morire. He is gifted, schizophrenic; he is irreparably damaged by his relationship with Eryns and retreats further into his illness; but his gift grows. And, most of all, he is rewarded with a vision of Mode Three.

The title is explained by a tape about Earth life forms: a cheetah—two of them—stalking a fawn. "If the fawn looks back the cheetahs freeze and do not advance. But the fawn does not look back. The cheetahs advance. The fawn is doomed."

When we see him at the end of the book we know that the illness has advanced so far, due to Eryns and their relationship, and the loss of Jardi, that it will never retreat; it has him (the fawn). But the talent, his gift for drawing, has advanced, too. So much, in fact, that the Computer has noticed it and wishes permanently to store his work. So he is both defeated and is victorious. But he is split in half (schizophrenia). He is successful as an artist but he has failed to reach the middle realm of social interhuman interaction.

Were it not for the vision granted him of Realm Three he would indeed be doomed, but the Computer has intervened and he will not die...he retains a memory of the vision. His perpetual attempt to render it graphically is proof of that.

Eryns appealed to the destructive—sadistic and self-destructive—masochistic elements in him, and Jardi knows that; this is one reason she broke off with him. She knew that part of him responded to that relationship; it wasn't Eryns' doing alone; it was collusion. And he finally realizes that Jardi is right...and so has lost his own respect for himself as a person. But, as an artist, he is unscathed. As an artist he is free of Realm One.

Gearworld. (Realm One).

Friendworld. (Realm Two).

Visionworld. (Realm Three).

Realm Three is called "Visionworld" because there your vision—eyesight—is restored. The people of the planet have sacred myths of a primordial fall in which they were blinded, and the three realms came into being. Originally they lived in Realm Three; there was only Realm Three. They fell all the way to Gearworld, and can only hope to rise up collectively again to Friendworld. Out of the factory and into the shops and cafes of the city.

Visionworld is conceived of as a light-struck meadow. Actually he finds it to be right here, in Gearworld back to which he has fallen; but everything is connected into a unity. This is Visionworld, this unity that is alive and thinks and is as aware of him as he of it. Not an it; a you.

Jardi is lost, forever lost, because of Eryns' sadism and destructiveness and vengefulness and

Philip K. Dick



Don Syllan

brutality (i.e. every woman in Nasvar's life after her). Nothing can retrieve or repair that; it is a fact. But the life-line of his work, his ability to do his work, is untouched and unimpaired. He winds up not destroyed but half-destroyed and half intact; half defeated and half victorious. The two rivulets of his life are grounded in his adolescence given at the beginning, when he lived with his mother and went to the library to scour reference books on freaks in order to draw them. This was psychological (his unexpressed hostility toward his mother: the radiation freaks stand for his mother, as he sees her) and this was his work; so originally the two were one stream, which later branched into two when he was introduced to Eryns.

Had they not branched into two streams he might have been totally destroyed or totally victorious; who can say? But a split did occur in him (schizophrenia; called on this planet "disbanding"). It was his salvation and his doom both, this disbanding.

In a sense he is twins (inside him) and one

twin flourished and one twin sickened and died (expressed by the irreparable loss of Jardi who represents all his loved ones, women, since Eryns).

At the end, then, he is not schizophrenic but so-to-speak half schizophrenic: half disbanded. His work still bands him to reality.

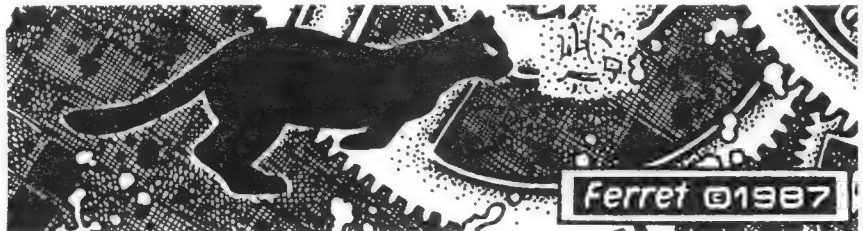
But he has traded well: the loss of half of himself (one twin) for the Visionworld experience; knowledge now that their planet is a giant computer, and that it finds his work pleasing (valuable) and is storing it, and encouraging him to produce more. Perhaps (it is hinted at) it foresaw from the beginning his sinister fate and so provided him with his talent in order that he would survive. So the Computer changed his destiny, which would have been one of total insanity and probably therefore suicide, with nothing attained.

But the Computer is his friend, and the Computer is their world.

(Better: it has been his friend all his life, without him knowing it.) ●

PKDS

PHILIP K. DICK

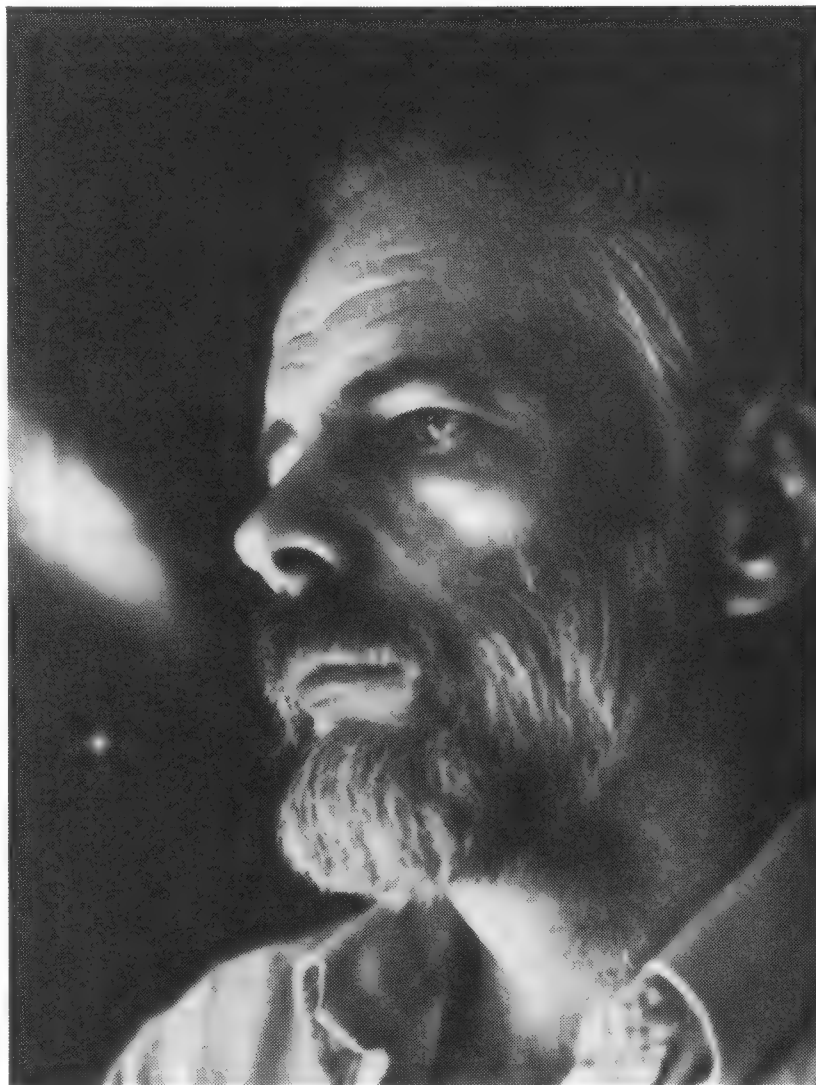


SOCIETY for info, write: PKDS, Box 611, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 USA

Philip K. Dick

A Conversation With Philip K. DICK

BY RICHARD A. LUPOFF



FRANK RONAN

LUPOFF: *A Handful of Darkness was your first collection. Can you tell us the genesis of the book?*

DICK: I had had a lot of stories published. In 1953 I published twenty-seven stories and almost as many the next year. In June of 1953 I had seven short stories on the stands simultaneously, but no American publisher had approached me to do a collection. This was before I had done any novels and Rich & Cowan in England approached me with the idea of putting out a collection of stories.

LUPOFF: *Do you recall who your editor was, or your contact person?*

DICK: No. They were incredibly primitive. I sent them several fantasies that had been published in *F&SF*, but because the stories dealt with children, Rich & Cowan decided they were stories for children. By the same token I suppose Agatha Christie's mysteries are for ax murderers. (laughter)

LUPOFF: *Who made the selection?*

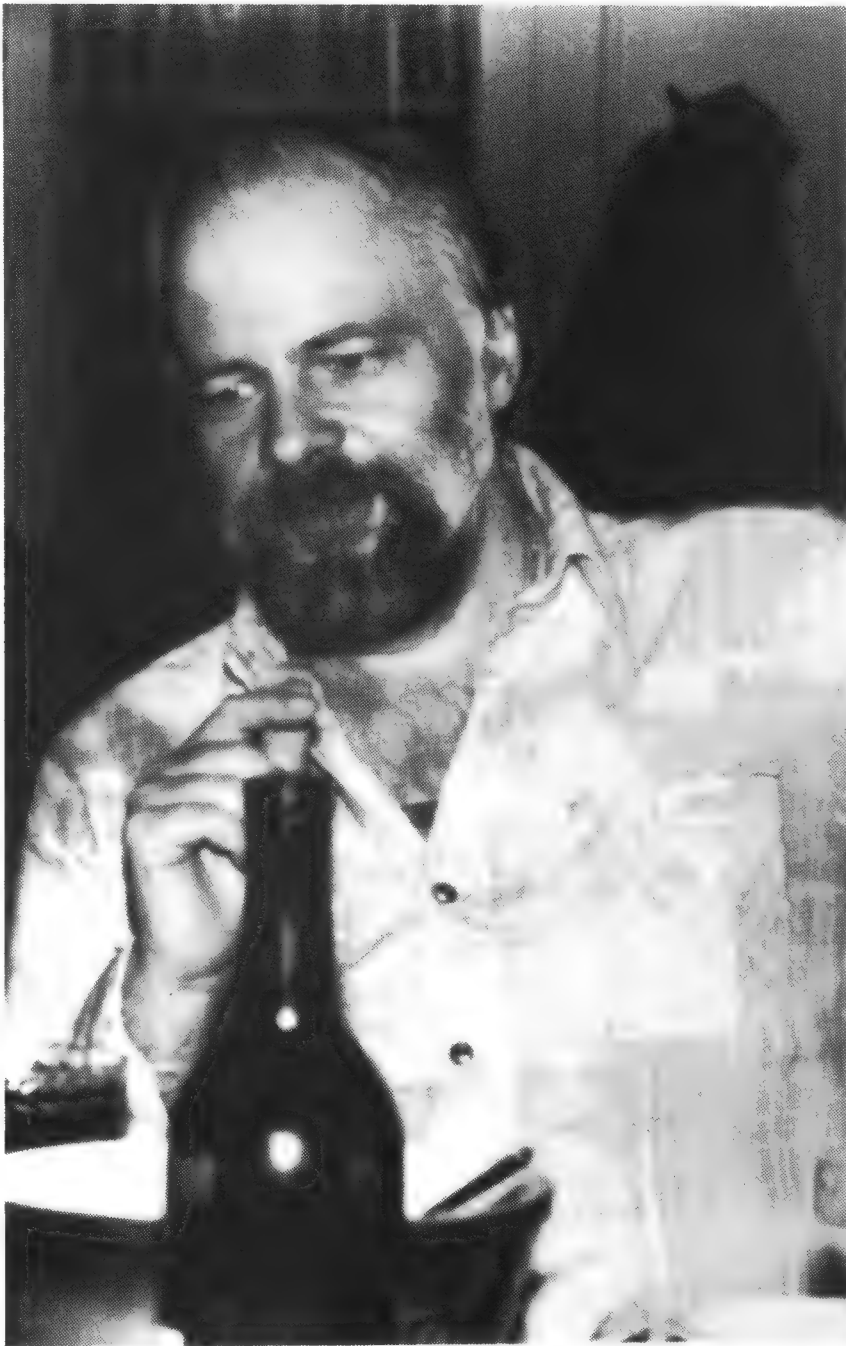
DICK: Well, I made the selection, by and large. Every story that they looked at was one that I had submitted to them, rather than one they found on their own. They continually kept rejecting stories and I kept sending more. So it took three or four separate batches of stories before they agreed on the contents. The contents was quite satisfactory to me at the time. They were all early stories and they were all rather short.

LUPOFF: *How do you feel about them now?*

DICK: I feel that they are very minor works now. Looking back on them, there is very little there of substance compared to later stuff.

LUPOFF: *I still don't understand how this thing started. How did*

Philip M. Dick



Phil Dick and wine bottle, circa 1978.

VIKI BLAYLOCK

they contact you? Did they come through your agent?

DICK: Yeah, through Scott Meredith. They bought *Solar Lottery*, my first novel, and brought it out as *World of Chance*. But they brought it out in a truncated form. They insisted that a great deal be deleted from it. I did, in fact, make a different version of *Solar Lottery* for them. It's quite different from the US version. But they just simply contacted me through Scott, which was easy enough.

LUPOFF: *At the time you had just gotten started. You had just graduated from UC...*

DICK: No, I didn't graduate.

LUPOFF: *You quit?*

DICK: Yeah, I quit after a short while.

LUPOFF: *What was your major?*

DICK: Philosophy.

LUPOFF: *Okay, so you left UC and you sat down and started writing. I mean, because you just sprang up-- from somebody who had never been published to somebody who, all of a sudden, as you yourself say, had seven stories in one month; twenty-odd stories in one year.*

DICK: Well, after going to Cal, I was working part-time in a record store, and then went to work full-time, and finally I got to the point where I was manager of the record department. I would work half a day, every day, and then write the other half.

In November of 1951 I made my first sale to Tony Boucher and...

LUPOFF: *Did you know Tony?*

DICK: Yes, I had attended a writing course that he gave. But that first one, I remember, was one of thirteen stories I submitted simultaneously. I figured, you know, I stood a chance of selling one of the

Philip H. Dick

thirteen—which is exactly what I did. But I had to revise it considerably for Tony.

LUPOFF: *Ray Nelson is now running a class like that, through the Unitarian Church, and one of his students is Anne Rice, who popped up with Interview With a Vampire. Another of his students is a guy named Robert Lee Hall, who wrote a book called Exit Sherlock Holmes, that's been through two or three printings and is quite successful. Ray seems to attract people who really have made it.*

DICK: I'm not sure writing can be taught. I didn't get much out of Tony's class. I think that the best source for a writer, or a person who wants to be a writer, is to read good prose models. There's no substitute for good prose models.

LUPOFF: *Can you name a few examples that influenced you?*

DICK: I liked the short stories of James T. Farrell very much. They had a tremendous influence on me in the short story form. Then in the novel form, the French realists like Flaubert and Stendahl and Balzac and Proust. And then the Russians: Turgenev and Dostoyevsky and some of the playwrights, like Chekhov, for example. I was very influenced by the French realist writers.

LUPOFF: *So you're not one of these science fiction writers who grew up reading "Doc" Smith and...*

DICK: I did that too, but the culture in Berkeley, the milieu in Berkeley at that time—in the late Forties—required that you have a fairly good grounding in the classics. If you hadn't read something like *Tom Jones* or *Ulysses* you were just dead, as far as being a guest anywhere. I mean, I had read lots of science fiction, but the pressure of the milieu was overwhelming.

You have to bear in mind that

"I'm not sure writing can be taught. I think the best source for a writer is to read good prose models."

at that time science fiction was so looked down upon that it would have been tantamount to suicide to, in a group of people, come forward and say, "Boy did I read a marvelous story recently," and they say, "Well, what was it?" And you say, "It was 'The Weapon Shops of Isher' by A.E. Van Vogt." They would have just pelted you with grapefruits and coffee grounds from the garbage. (laughter) If they could have deciphered who you meant, anyway. They didn't even know the name.

There wasn't anybody who read both. You could either be in with the group of freaks who read Heinlein and Van Vogt and nothing else, or you could be in with the people who read Dos Passos and Melville and Proust. But you could never get the two together.

I chose the company of those who were reading the great literature because I liked them better as people. The early fans were just, you know, trolls and wackos. I mean, being stuck with them would be like something from the first part of Dante's *Commedia*—up to your ass in shit. They really were terribly ignorant and weird people, so I just secretly read science fiction.

LUPOFF: *Those were the days when you hid this month's issue of*

Startling Stories inside a copy of whatever...

DICK: Of *War and Peace*, yeah. There was a kind of an embryonic, you know, fetal fandom coming into existence, because there was the Little Men's Marching and Chowder Society and I knew the people in it, but they were all real weird freaks. They were unpalatable to me because they did not read the great literature.

LUPOFF: *What you said about the trolls is true. I mean, there were some nice people, it's not that I would unanimously consign these people to the Pit—if I were consigning people to the Pit. But I would say that an inordinate proportion of them are pretty bizarre and essentially unsavory kind of characters. Not unsavory in the sense of being nasty or violent or destructive types, but...*

DICK: Yeah, losers. I rejected the ghetto concept of science fiction right from the beginning of it. These people seem to prefer the ghetto. They want it to be a separate thing from mainstream life and mainstream fiction both. This has certainly had tragic repercussions for the growth of the field, because this mentality has continued.

LUPOFF: *Well, you know Larry Niven's theory? He maintains that it is not a ghetto, it's a country club. It's an exclusive and luxurious domain. Of course, Larry Niven inherited a huge fortune. He has oil money, so he's been able to take that attitude right from the outset.*

DICK: It's a ghetto in the respect that most science fiction fans are ignorant of great mainstream literature of the past. I mean, very few of them have ever read *War and Peace*, but all of them have read *The Hobbit* trilogy. I'm not putting down Tolkien, because I've read the trilogy too, but I would hate to

Philip H. Dick

have missed out on great books like *War and Peace*. I'm glad that the Berkeley of the late Forties/early Fifties forced me to read things like *The Red and the Black* and *Madame Bovary* and others because those are really great books and they taught me a lot about writing. They taught me a lot about how to write a novel. Maupassant taught me a lot about how to write a short story. So did James T. Farrell, and some of the *New Yorker* short story writers.

But when I started to write science fiction, the people in Berkeley would say, "but are you doing anything serious?" That used to make me really mad. I'd get really mad and I'd, all of a sudden, just drop my posing and get really furious. And I'd say, "my science fiction is very serious." If I said anything at all. I usually just got so mad I couldn't talk.

But the science fiction I wrote before I sold I took as seriously as the experimental stuff I wrote. I wrote a lot of experimental short stories.

LUPOFF: *Did you sell any of them?*

DICK: No. I submitted them to, like, *Tiger's Eye*, but I was never able to sell any of them.

LUPOFF: *Are any of them still around?*

DICK: No, they're destroyed. All the manuscripts were destroyed.

LUPOFF: *That's too bad. Do you have any idea how many there were?*

DICK: Oh, thirty maybe. And I wrote eleven experimental novels. They're still around. They're over at Cal State Fullerton.

LUPOFF: *Do they include Crap Artist?*

DICK: *Confession of a Crap artist* was one of them, but that came in 1959, that was later. That came before *Man in the High Castle*. That's really the bridge between my

"The early fans were trolls and wackos. Being stuck with them would be like something from Dante's *Commedia*; up to your ass in shit."

Ace Double science fiction type of writing and *Man in the High Castle*. Actually, if you read what I wrote for Ace prior to Putnam's buying *Man in the High Castle*, you cannot account for *Man in the High Castle*. It doesn't seem to come out of Ace Books. But if you read *Confessions of a Crap Artist* and date it as 1959 and 1961 for *Man in the High Castle*, you can bridge the gap between the two.

LUPOFF: *So, anyway. There you are in 1953 and all of a sudden you sell your first story to Tonyoucher. Do you recall which story that was?*

DICK: "Roog." It's about garbage men. It's about a dog who can sense that the garbage men are predatory carnivores from another planet, who accept the garbage each week as a propitiatory offering in surrogate for the people themselves. But eventually these garbage men will tire of accepting these surrogate offerings and take the people in the houses and eat them. And that is how the dog sees the garbage men. The story is from the dog's point of view and the garbage

men are seen as only quasi-humanoid. They have thin necks and their heads are like pumpkins and their heads wobble.

I remember that Judith Merrill saw the story and refused to anthologize it because she said that garbage men *don't* have thin necks, and wobbly heads, and so on. *It's not true*. So I wrote her a long letter explaining to her that that's the way the dog saw it and she would have to accept the dog's viewpoint. But she still wouldn't accept the story for anthologizing because she said it just wasn't true. *Garbage men aren't that way*.

So I said to her, "It's a fantasy, Judy. A fantasy. Do you understand what is meant by a fantasy?" But she said, "No, a fantasy is a story with a fantasy premise, and then it's realistic from then on."

So I said that in this story the fantasy premise is that the dog has a different point of view from us and that everything is predicated on that. But I couldn't convince her. The story is still in print. Bob Silverberg reprinted it recently in one of his collections, *Science Fiction Bestiary*, so it's still in print.

LUPOFF: *She couldn't grasp that it was make-believe, a fantasy.*

DICK: Yeah, I ran into a lot of opposition because my early fantasy stories were essentially psychological stories. They were heavily into anxieties such as animals or children feel, in which the thing that was feared would actually come into existence and was treated objectively.

I just gave up writing them, finally. People would make that kind of criticism. They would say, "There's no such thing as..." Their sentences would begin that way. So finally I just gave up and went over and wrote science fiction and abandoned the fantasy format. Because

ONLY APPARENTLY.... by Ted White

As time goes on, and more interviews with Philip K. Dick surface, it becomes more and more apparent that Phil Dick had a poor grasp on his own reality—at least when it came to his dealings with agents, editors and publishers. Virtually every story he told about his experiences is suspect, and must be independently checked. His attitude toward his editors was almost unfailingly one of unveiled contempt, and those of us who were first his friends and later his editors had to endure complete turnarounds in the way he treated us and spoke of us.

Paul Williams' *Only Apparently Real* unwittingly bears this point out: the one time Williams checked one of Phil's accounts against his agent's records Paul found that Phil had gotten the dates wrong, the chronology wrong, and the basic point he was making about them wrong. One can speculate about the reasons for this—I suspect it was Phil's long-term consumption of amphetamines, although Phil claimed to Paul that his physiology was unique and the speed had no effect on him, a story I wish could have been verified—but in any case the result was a paranoia which resulted in scurilous stories about people like Terry Carr, one of Phil's most sympathetic editors. (Carr alone is named, in this context, in *Only Apparently Real*, although others, including myself, have been libelled

in Phil's published interviews.)

Only Apparently Real is only apparently valuable as a reference work on Phil Dick. It offers a good deal of biographical data, and a chronology of Phil's life and writing—but its main thrust is lopsided, focussing as it does on one period in Phil's life (the now-famous 1971 break-in) which occurred not long before Paul initially interviewed him for *Rolling Stone*, and which is given far more space and attention than it deserves. Indeed, this book is basically an expansion of that interview, drawing heavily on the transcripts and using them and the incident of the break-in (the subject of endless speculation without resolution on Phil's part) as the centerpiece and appending the events which preceded and followed almost as afterthoughts. The temptation is to take the "facts" offered by the book at face value, but to the extent that they depend upon Dick as their source, they are of dubious authenticity.

Because the book centers on the 1971 incident and Paul Williams' subsequent relationship with Dick (Paul coyly turns himself into a work of art—Phil's art) short shrift is given to Phil's most fecund period (the fifties and sixties), and his collaborations with Ray Nelson and Roger Zelazny go unmentioned. Indeed, Williams' view of Phil Dick simply does not include most of Phil's earlier friends and associates,

nor the possibility that Phil *could* collaborate with anyone else (Phil was too unique, too much the property of those who attached themselves to him in the seventies).

Equally, the events which followed the 1971 break-in—principally Phil's 1974 conversion to Christianity—are given little weight here. It might well be argued that the 1974 conversion was the single most important event in Phil's life, profoundly changing both his philosophy of life and his writing—one can in fact infer as much from Williams' book—but this is not the point or theme of *Only Apparently Real*. Rather, this book depends far too much upon Paul Williams' earlier experience of Phil Dick, spiralling in on their original meeting and interview, and celebrating Phil's relationship with Paul—who is described on the book's back cover in these words: "Paul Williams, close friend of Philip K. Dick and literary executor of the estate since Dick's death in 1982..."

Phil had, over his life, many "close friends," some of whom he subsequently savaged. It is the good fortune of those who enjoyed this relationship with the man in his final decade that most of them escaped his inevitable disillusionment and vituperation. But the cult which they have built around him since his death is a disturbing one, and the honor they do him is...only apparently real. ●

what I meant by a fantasy was evidently not what other people meant by a fantasy. My idea of a fantasy was where the archetypal elements become objectified and you have an exteriorization of what our inner contents are.

I remember I had a term I used to defend this kind of internal

projection stories. Stories where internal psychological elements were projected onto the outer world and became three dimensional and real and concrete. Scott, my agent, wrote me incredibly long letters saying that there was no such thing. There was the inner world of dreams and fantasies and the unconscious

and then there was the objective outer world, and the two never mixed. So I gave up.

Later, when I'd established myself more securely in the field, I began to go and do it in such books as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. I reverted to what I wanted to do and had the nightmare

Philip K. Dick



Phil Dick and Theodore Sturgeon.



Phil and his daughter Isa.

inner content objectified in the outer world. So I slowly began to reintroduce those elements into my writing.

LUPOFF: *Do you do any fantasy now?*

DICK: No. No I don't. It pretty much cured me of trying any fantasy.

LUPOFF: *Let me tell you. I wrote a story about a woman who can see into her husband's dreams. She wakes up in the middle of the night and can see, in sort of a cloud over her husband's head, what he is dreaming. It's not a good marriage and he has essentially retreated—his life is really drab, anyhow. He could be one of your garbage men. We really never do get to know his job except that he works at the plant. So he drinks a lot of beer and watches a lot of television and daydreams and dream dreams. These actual sleeping dreams are his last avenue of retreat from an unpleasant, though not directly threatening, environment. He lives adequately, but he's not happy.*

So his psychic energy goes into his dreams and she succeeds in invading them, they were his last refuge.

DICK: Oh, that's a terrific idea.

LUPOFF: *It was written for Heavy Metal, of course. Because they are French in orientation and erotic and morbid; their three themes. Gallic culture, eroticism and morbidity. So the name of the story is "Mort in Bed."*

DICK: Ursula Le Guin in *The Lathe of Heaven* gets into the idea of dreams being somehow objectively real.

LUPOFF: *Yes. Effective dreaming.*

DICK: I was fascinated by that. There is, of course, a contemporary heretical sect of scientists and laymen who, based on Jung's theory

K.W. JETER

Philip H. Dick

that UFOs were projections from the collective unconscious, that have begun to talk about mental contents as being actually objective. This is the Tulpa theory that they can be projected into the outer world and even be photographed, and are sensible objects. They are objects of our percept system and are projected from the unconscious--which is just one step further from Jung's idea that an individual will project elements of his unconscious. Now we have the collective unconscious of a number of people being projected and forming Tulpa objects. I've read some interesting material on that. It's also connected with the weird scientific discovery that the observer influences the performance of sub-atomic particles.

Now one of the basic psychotic ideas is that you can affect objects by just thinking about them, and yet this has crept into quantum physics. By picking up the Jungian thing we arrive at the conclusion that we can and do project a lot of our outer reality. This is exactly what I was trying to do in my early stories.

LUPOFF: *Were you reading Jung then?*

DICK: Yes. Yes, definitely. He was a major influence on me.

LUPOFF: *Can you recall specific works?*

DICK: *Psychological Types* would be one. I read all the Jung that was in print in English at that time, but not very much was in print in English. Since then I've read so much more because the Pantheon Press people have published all of Jung in English. I can't remember which ones were in print in English then, except *Psychological Types*. Most early Jung...

LUPOFF: *I came across an article the other day by a guy who was as unintellectual and unsophisticated as can be. He was just a huge pulp*

"I ran into a lot of opposition to my fantasies because they were essentially psychological stories. They were heavily into anxieties."

fan, but he somehow came across the concept of Tulpas. He maintains that in the apartment in Greenwich Village where Walter Gibson lived in the 1930s, when he was writing The Shadow novels--two a month--that the fellow who lives there now can see this vague figure moving around the apartment all the time. And the figure is Lamont Cranston.

He didn't know anything about the history of the building. He discovered that Walter Gibson had written all those Shadow novels in that apartment and he deduced that Walter Gibson had created a Lamont Cranston Tulpa by writing all those books in that room, and that that figure is still there.

DICK: That's very interesting. Back at the time I was starting to write science fiction, I was asleep one night and I woke up and there was a figure standing at the edge of the bed, looking down at me. I grunted in amazement and all of a sudden my wife woke up and started screaming because she could see it too. She started screaming, but I recognized it and I started reassuring her, saying that it was me that

was there and not to be afraid. Within the last two years--let's say that was in 1951--I've dreamed almost every night that I was back in that house, and I have a strong feeling that back then in 1951 or '52 that I saw my future self, who had somehow, in some way we don't understand--I wouldn't call it occult--passed backward during one of my dreams now of that house, going back there and seeing myself again. So there really are some strange things...

That's the kind of stuff I would write as a fantasy in the early Fifties.

LUPOFF: *Who were the editors you were dealing with and selling to back then?*

DICK: Tony Boucher for *F&SF*, Horace Gold for *Galaxy* and *Beyond*, Bill Hamlyn at *Imagination*, and the editor for *Fantastic Universe*, Hans Stefan Santesson. That's all I can remember. Any magazine that was extant in 1953 I was dealing with. Except for Campbell.

LUPOFF: *You never dealt with Campbell?*

DICK: Well, he just said my stories were nuts. He said they were crazy. He bought one story.

LUPOFF: *What was that?*

DICK: That was "Imposter." He said that psi was a necessary premise for a science fiction story, and I had a very strong prejudice against psionics. I thought it was a form of the occult and should not be allowed to invade science fiction. I've changed my mind since, but at the time I thought of it like witchcraft and stuff like that. Superstitious.

LUPOFF: *What made you change your mind?*

DICK: I think the powers actually exist. I think they're real.

LUPOFF: *Now these editors you*

Philip H. Dick



Phil and one of his cats, circa 1960.

dealt with--Boucher lived in Berkeley, and you were in his group--but did you have any direct contact with these others, or was it all through Meredith?

DICK: Well, Horace Gold and I wrote back and forth quite a bit. I met Evelyn Page Gold, who was then married to him, in '64. Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, was very nice. He was a lot of help to me. Howard Browne was a very good editor.

LUPOFF: *What did he do for you?*

DICK: He defined the type of story he felt I could best write, and he was quite correct. I did a lot of stuff for him.

LUPOFF: *This was all by mail?*

DICK: Yes, though I did meet him in 1964 and liked him immensely.

LUPOFF: *I never met him, but I had an interesting letter from him. I wrote a book about Edgar Rice Burroughs--the first thing I ever wrote--and I mentioned people whose work resembled Burroughs or might have influenced Burroughs or been influenced by him. I mentioned a couple of books by Browne, *Warrior of the Dawn* and *The Return of Tharn*. And Browne wrote me a letter and said that as a matter of fact, Burroughs had read *Warrior of the Dawn* when it first came out in about 1940. And Burroughs had said, "Dear Mr. Browne. I really enjoyed *Warrior of the Dawn* and it is one of the best books I ever wrote."*

DICK: Howard Browne was a very nice guy. I later had a terrible fight, in 1954, with Horace Gold because Gold would change parts of your story and add whole new scenes and characters without telling you, and publish them. And you would suddenly discover that you had collaborated with Horace Gold. I just got to the point where I

ANNE DICK

Philip H. Dick

couldn't stand it anymore. I told him I wouldn't submit to him as long as he was going to take out scenes and put in other scenes. So I did not resubmit to *Galaxy* until he ceased to be the editor of it. That was my main market at the time, and I took a tremendous financial risk by doing that, but by then I was going into the novel form. But that was one of the reasons I went into the novel form, and then I started hassling with Donald Wollheim, so I didn't gain a thing.

LUPOFF: *How come you went to work for Ace Books, of all publishers?*

DICK: Scott did the marketing. I had nothing to do with that. There really wasn't much else of a market.

LUPOFF: *Ballantine was starting up about that same time.*

DICK: Yeah, that's true, but Scott kept selling to Ace. I had no control over that. Sixteen times we went with Ace.

LUPOFF: *Did Wollheim mess with your copy?*

DICK: Never. Oh, once with *Dr. Futurity*. He made a lot of cuts in *Dr. Futurity*, but outside of that he never messed with them.

LUPOFF: *He didn't monkey with any of your other stuff, why did he cut *Dr. Futurity*?*

DICK: Because in *Dr. Futurity* I had Christianity dying out and interracial marriages. Don disapproved of Christianity dying out or talk of it dying out. And he definitely disapproved of the interracial marriages.

LUPOFF: *He's so scared about treading on toes. I'll give you a Don Wollheim story. My first novel, a book called *One Million Centuries*—bad book, but what the hell, we all write first novels. I sent a portion*

“Campbell said my stories were nuts. He said they were crazy. He only bought one.”

*and an outline to Terry Carr, who was then working for Don. And Terry said, “Hey, I like this. I'd like to buy it, but I need Don's approval.” This was before the *Special* series, and he didn't have the clout to buy a book without approval.*

So he turned the proposal over to Don who held it for quite a while and finally bounced it and sent me a rejection slip—which is somewhere in my house, and I'd pay twenty dollars if I could find it because he listed his objections to it.

But the major objection was that the hero was black, and he said, “Surveys indicate that most of our readers are white and that most black people don't read books, or at least not science fiction. So nobody would want to buy this book, so I don't want to publish it.”

I'm inclined to believe that these are less of Don's personal prejudices and convictions than they are very calculated commercial considerations.

DICK: That could be, yeah.

LUPOFF: *God knows he'd have no objection to a novel about Christianity dying out—not being a Christian. First of all, he's Jewish by birth, and he's a sort of radical atheist.*

DICK: He was supposed to be a communist for a while.

LUPOFF: *Oh yes, he makes no pretense about it. In fact, I asked him about it for an article I was writing about social and political attitudes in science fiction for *Ramparts*. I asked him a few questions and he said that back in the late Thirties/early Forties when it was fashionable to be a communist, a bunch of science fiction fans—including himself—had a contact with some recruiters from the Communist Party USA. And the “real” communists wanted nothing to do with the science fiction fans because they thought that science fiction was too far divorced from immediate reality. It was utopian and fantastic and what these people should do is abandon science fiction and then they'd be acceptable as recruits for communism. But they didn't want them as long as they were going to be science fiction fans.*

DICK: Yeah, I remember an article in *The People's World* after World War II in which science fiction was denounced as a reactionary tool of the Imperialist, Fascist powers. Then, as you know, the party switched its mind on science fiction and became pro science fiction. I think they changed over about the time of Sputnik.

LUPOFF: *Yeah, science fiction is considered acceptable in the Soviet Union. They publish a good deal of it. Have you had any works published in Russia or other Socialist countries?*

DICK: Well, *Ubik* has appeared in Poland in a very nice edition, and they're bringing out *Solar Lottery* and *Man in the High Castle* in Poland. They've purchased them, but haven't paid me for them yet. And I've heard that I'm the third most published American science fiction writer in Russia, but I don't receive any royalties.

LUPOFF: *Who are the other two?*

Philip H. Dick

DICK: Heinlein and Asimov. Heinlein is very popular in Russia.

LUPOFF: *(laughs)* That's amazing. I wonder what he thinks of that?

DICK: I don't know. That's his problem. I don't even know if he knows, because it was even hard for me to find that out myself. I was trying to find out if I had any substantial royalties in the Soviet Union, and I did find out that my books are published there.

I had a story pirated by their leading literary magazine and published in the Fifties. The magazine, *Ogonek*, had a circulation of a million, five hundred thousand copies. It was the magazine equivalent of *Pravda*. I wrote them and they paid me out of an account in a Wall Street bank and they sent me a copy of the magazine, but it was confiscated by the US Postal authorities as communist propaganda. *(laughter)* That's really true.

LUPOFF: *What was the story?*

DICK: "Foster, You're Dead," which Ballantine printed in the *Star* anthologies. The Soviet magazine ran thirty-two pages--the pages being the size of *Life* magazine--and five pages was the story and illustrations and everything. They asked me to submit stuff directly to them, but I never did. They paid me exactly three and a half cents a word, which is what *Astounding* and *Galaxy* were paying at that time. They knew exactly what the rates were in the United States. *(laughs)*

LUPOFF: *I was pirated by a magazine in Spain, a big slick Life magazine type magazine. They took an article I wrote about Janis Joplin for Ramparts. I only found out about it because I happened to see a copy of the magazine. So I wrote them a letter. I told them I had mixed feelings about what they had done. I was flattered that they thought so highly of my stuff and*

"I've heard that I'm the third most published science fiction author in Russia, but I don't receive any royalties."

went through all the trouble of getting it translated and put in this beautiful format in this plush magazine, but it would be nice if they had paid me.

DICK: I find I just don't write short stuff anymore. I can't even come up with a final draft of this novel for Bantam because I'm doing so much research on it. I now do so much research that I just don't have time to write. Sometimes I work until five in the morning on research. I don't ever want to have happen what happened on *Deus Irae* where I started a book and found out I didn't know enough about my subject matter to do the book. I didn't know enough about Christianity. So I'm trying to avoid that particular pitfall.

But it's really funny. Roger [Zelazny] and I have just cleaned up on *Deus Irae*. We made a mint on it.

LUPOFF: *It must be the authors, because in all honesty, I like your books better than that, and I like Roger's books better than that. But a shared byline by two people who both pack a wallop can't miss.*

DICK: I called Roger the other day about *Deus Irae*. This just tripped

me out. My ex-wife Tessa brought me a copy of the first paperback of *Roots*. *Roots* went into paperback as of this month, November 1977. And she said, "Here's the paperback of *Roots*." I said, "Fine. Are you giving this to me?" She said, "Look in the back." I looked in the back and there was a full page ad for *Deus Irae*.

So I called up Roger and I said, "Roger, I want to approach what I have to say this way. Now that *Roots* has finally come out in paperback, by Dell, how many copies do you think the first printing would run?" And he said, "Well, somewhere between one and two million, I would guess."

"Fine," I said. "There are between one and two million ads for *Deus Irae*, which includes a coupon you can clip out and send in."

LUPOFF: *Oh great.*

DICK: It's the greatest advertisement we've ever had. Isn't that incredible? ●

Contributing editor Richard Lupoff has written a variety of books, including Circumpolar and the ground-breaking Space War Blues. He has recently finished a mystery novel. His upcoming contributions to these pages include a short story in EYE #3 and whatever else he can find in the bottom of his filing cabinet.

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ALTERNATIVES

In the early 1970s he suspended himself from the ceiling by wires clamped into his flesh. did it at twenty-two "suspension events," attaching sound-amplification devices to his body to interpret its reactions, as he swayed and twitched. He didn't enjoy the pain, he explained, any more than a woman giving birth enjoys the pain of it. The pain was a travail integral to the suspension, to the process of declaring the body's transcendence of all conventional boundaries.

Between 1973 and 1975 he made "Three Internal Films of My Body," filming the interior of his stomach, and introducing cameras into his colon, into the left and right bronchi of the lungs. In later performances he utilized devices for amplifying body rhythms, including plethysmogram, dopplergram, EEG, ECG, EMG, and kineto-angle transducer. He has lectured on "man-Machine symbiosis," "Modified Man," and "The Obsolete Body." He has lately begun staging events using an artificial third hand, hard-wiring his body with a variety of electronic enhancement devices.

His name is Stelarc. All the signposts direct us to him.

If there are signposts on the road of time, the one just up ahead says:

WARNING:

NEW REALITY AHEAD

RSETC ACCL

The third line on the road-sign stands for: *Rate of Social, Environmental and Technological Change Accelerating* (and, one might add, converging). The implicit message is: *Adjust accordingly.*

More than once people have observed that SF could become obsolete when we "catch up with the future." They were probably wrong. But SF *could* become sluggish. In

BY JOHN SHIRLEY



PART ONE STELARC & THE NEW REALITY

fact, most of it may well already be shockingly (or future shockingly, to Tofflerians) irrelevant. There are indications that phenomena SF writers predicted for late in the 21st Century may be part of daily life by the year 1999. Bell labs has reportedly developed a "chip that works like the brain," a wafer of silicon containing chips that work together like neurons. Something called Parallel Processing promises --along with Nanotechnology--to make artificial intelligence a reality. Parallel Processing abandons step-by-step *linear* problem solving for systems using a large number of processors, dozens to thousands,

which simultaneously attack a problem and collate the results with a sort of mathematical holography. Opto-electronic computers--using optics for switching and data transmission--look like they'll be a thousand times faster than electronic computers.

Nanotechnology may well be the most important breakthrough since the silicon chip. It is the super-miniaturization of thinking machines; AI that uses organic molecules, programmed by DNA, as its circuitry (the implications of this have been explored to some extent in Greg Bear's *Blood Music*.) Nanotechnology could make the Asimovian robot realizable. All the necessary gear for intelligent, independent artificial thinking could, after all, be packed into a small metal skull.

The computer is the fundamental workhorse of the other sciences; researchers in the life sciences, in physics, meteorology, virtually every field, use computers to sort and collate and project their data. It's often no longer necessary to carry out an experiment in the lab. It can be done via computer model. Faster computers mean faster advances in all fields.

If an Authority says that something won't come about for a century, that's a strong indicator to look for it in a decade. It'll take a century or more to identify all the individual human genes, we were told a few years ago. But the new Caltech gene sequencer is the prototype of a computer which works in tandem with other machinery to analyze and define each separate component of the DNA molecule. As a result, Caltech's Leroy Hood tells us: "In the next twenty years we'll learn more than in the last two thousand."

New materials make robotics and dozens of other technologies more expandable: plastics tough as steel, glass that bends without breaking, metals that stretch, mater--



Marwan Murr/Courtesy of Katherine McNulty

ials made in layers as thin as a single atom. The fevered search for a room-temperature superconductor going on right now could result in a dramatic alteration in every item that uses electricity, radical changes that will be commonplace before the turn of the century. Superconductor technology may make all current energy systems obsolete.

The new and growing international media grid, with its instantaneous transfer of information and multi-access databases, has magnified the availability of catalyzing ideas--creating a fertile and cross-fertile research environment congenial to the genesis of these changes.

As a result of all this, our lifestyles and environment will be radically altered--for both good and bad--and so will our culture. Culture is a level of consensual reality, and a new reality is burgeoning around us.

Our challenge is not only to adjust but to control our new reality constructively.

That challenge has been there for at least a century, in lesser degrees...is science fiction a reaction to it? A sort of unconscious social response to the general background anxiety about technological change? It might be, partly. But is it adequate to the new, hyper-dense stage of the challenge, in the new era? The Movement writers--Gibson, Sterling, Lew Shiner, Greg Bear, Cadigan, Swanwick, Marc Laidlaw, Richard Kadrey, this writer and others--have attempted to rise to the new-era challenge, with some success.

But Movement SF is not for everyone. It may be that in the long run, because of the restrictions of publishing business imperatives and television-numbed public taste, it won't ever reach critical mass, won't quite escape the gravitational field of that great lump of agate-strewn mud we call Our Genre. It may be that SF's generic under-

His views on technology and its importance to this stage in human development are strikingly parallel to ideas explored by Bruce Sterling and Samuel Delany.

pinings will (by reason of artistic and conceptual callowness, its structural weakness) undermine the Movement's ability to answer the challenge. We may well be too tied to commercial considerations to find our way through the New Reality.

To whom, then, do we turn for guidance?

There are others, doing the work of science fiction outside the genre, creating a kind of literature of experimental activity, an ongoing lexicon of imagistic adjustments to the arriving future. And prominent among these is Stelarc.

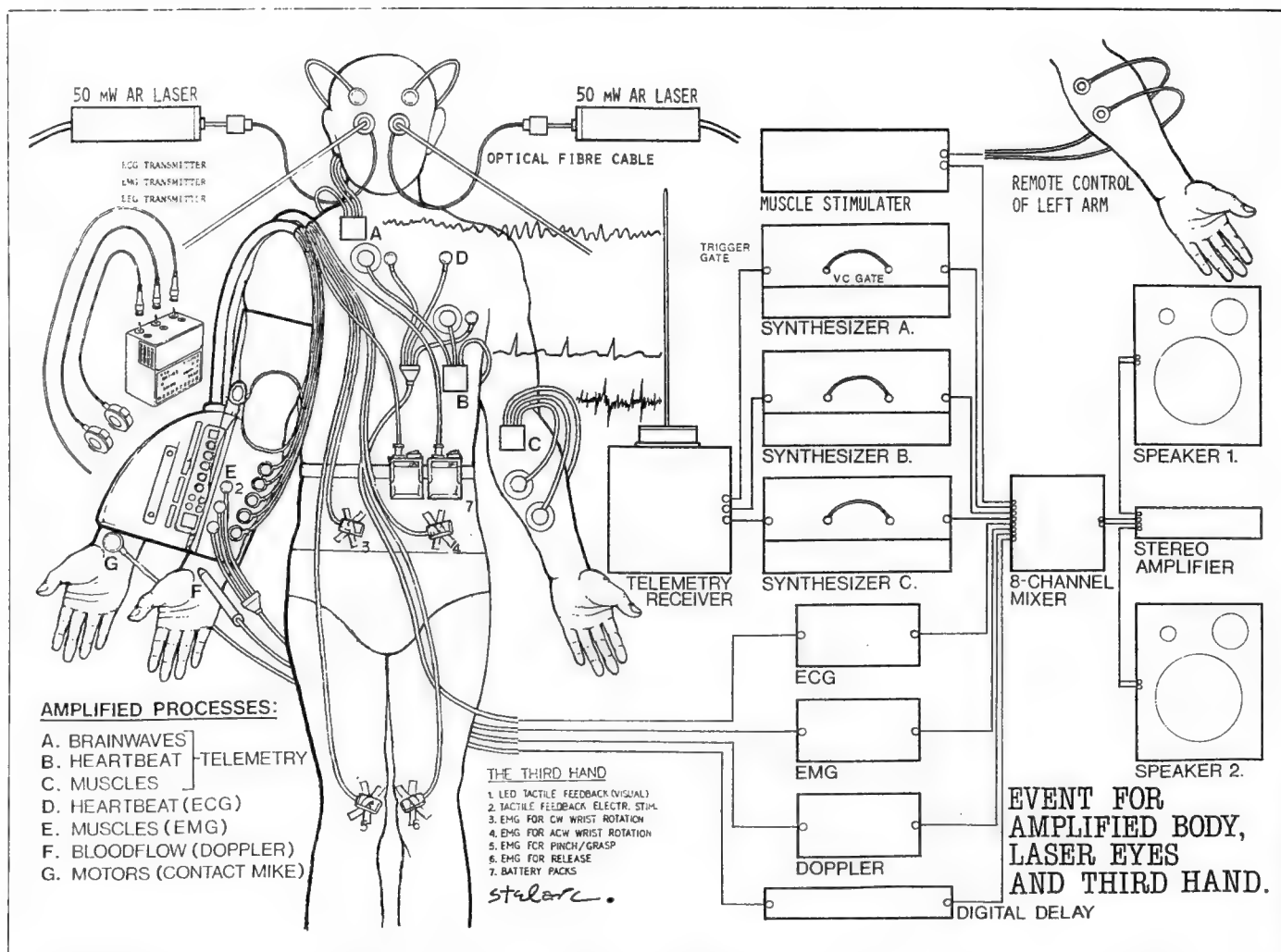
A native of Australia, Stelarc is a performance artist who has resided in Japan since 1970, where he teaches at Yokohama International School. He's performed in Japan, Australia, the USA, Canada, Brazil and Germany.

Stelarc's fascination with the internal rhythms and "architecture" of the body progressed from scrutinizing it internally under bizarre stress conditions, to seeking new relationships between the body, the mind, and the environment. His views on technology and its importance to this stage in human development are strikingly parallel to ideas explored by Bruce Sterling in *Schismatrix* and Samuel Delany in *Nova*. He discusses science fictional ideas as if they are currently crystallizing facts of life; as if they are

realities in the process of coming into being. He proposes, through "telepresence systems," that we are capable of exploring the solar system through remote control robotics directly linked with operators who see what the robot sees, feel what it feels. Stelarc talks as if it's a viable career alternative, and, more, a "strategy" for dealing with the existential dilemma itself. He discusses the possibility of using genetic engineering to create artificial skin sheaths which are "solar active," absorbing solar energy and converting it to organic energy utilized by the body. He suggests that: "We're at the time now where we have to start redesigning the human body to match the technology we've created." He feels we're destined, as some unguessable fulfillment of our evolutionary destiny, to enter space and make it our own habitat; not just as a new site for colonization and exploitation, but as a kind of spiritual emergence into greater diversity in our relationship to the cosmos.

Stelarc tells us that, "The human body is biologically ill-equipped to be thrust into outer space..." Making the necessary adjustments artificially is "not a matter of mechanizing man, but of triggering a kind of Hegelian evolutionary dialectic...we are confronted by the end of the human form as we know it...an imploding, miniaturized technology not only focuses physical changes on each individual, but also explodes the species...the artist can become an evolutionary guide, an architect of internal body spaces...the artist can be a body [designer]..."

Stelarc has taken a short but firm step in this direction with his "Event for Amplified Body, Laser Eyes, and Third Hand." His earlier work was concerned with probing and piercing the body; this new event attempts to "extend and enhance it." He explains that the artificial hand "is capable of in-



Stelarc/Courtesy of Katherine McMurdo

dependent motion, being triggered by signals from the abdominal and thigh muscles. It has pinch-release, grasp release, 270 degree wrist rotation and a tactile feedback system for a 'sense of touch.' But while the body activates its extra manipulator, the real left arm is remote-controlled, jerked into action by a muscle stimulator with varying voltage and frequency."

Sonic translations of body processes are triggered by brainwave (EEG) readouts, electrical signals from muscles, electrocardiogram, and bloodflow; a kineto-angle transducer transforms bending motion into a sequence of signals. The sounds that emerge are a mesh of the chaotic and rhythmical, a combination of percussive and wind sounds,

both controlled and random. Stelarc orchestrates all this with a variety of methods including the use of "digital delay to loop and superimpose sequences of sound..." He casually adds that, "The use of a telemetry unit minimizes the hard-wiring of the body to the equipment, safely isolating it from the electrical system."

In some events, lasers have been reflected off small mirrors stuck to Stelarc's eyes. He "drew" with the reflected beams by moving his eyes about under the mirrors, so that the organ that is normally passive to light, its receptor, became its expressor, its redesigner. Stelarc has updated the effect with optical fibre cable and lens, allowing more powerful Argon lasers to be used

safely and with more control. The laser eyes are modulated by the heartbeat, pulsing on and off, and are further modulated by the motion of the head and eyeblinks.

Stelarc performs in a "structured light environment," a sort of enclosing polyhedron of light-tubes, which "flares and flickers, responding and reacting to the electrical discharges of the body--sometimes synchronizing, sometimes counterpointing. Light...is seen as a physical phenomenon which can directly affect the rhythms of the body."

Stelarc's performances are mimetic interpretations of the new reality, but they are also experiments in the search for a more refined affinity with technology itself. "Just as a primate's larynx

prevents it from articulating speech," Stelarc said in a radio broadcast, "so our human architecture prevents us from reaching cortical and sensory sophistication... what was once the instrument for adapting to the environment now becomes the means of transcending it..."

Stelarc expresses frustration with the limits of the senses and the brain's ability to process information. "Imagine [with electronic enhancement via cerebral/electronic interfacing] the psychological impact of having a kind of micro/macro vision...your vision could slide from microscopic phenomena to tele-scopic...if your vision could zoom from the internal structure of a cell to scanning the expanses of nebulae ...imagine the philosophical impact..."

Is such day-to-day mundane extension of the senses through electronics—long a standard theme in science fiction—becoming so practically conceivable that artists are now visualizing its use? A new chip, made of a plastic-silicon combination that human nerve tissue does not reject, has recently come into development, created exclusively for just such an interfacing. A chip that would provide a link to a microcomputer designed to be sunk into the human body. What other mechanisms could it link us to? With the proper processing buffer, any at all.

I became aware of Stelarc when the editors of *New Pathways* sent me some material on him because his performance was reminiscent of the wire dancers in my novel *Eclipse*. Indeed, there is a conceptual synchronicity in Stelarc, in *Neuromancer*, in *Schismatrix*, in *Eclipse*, in Laurie Anderson and other performance artists, which would seem to indicate a kind of "steam engine time," a parallel development across the various medias, for the recognition of the new, hyper-intimate and all-encompassing phase of man's interaction

Stelarc canonizes technology; SRL burns it at the stake. Both ends of the spectrum of man's relationship to the New Reality are explored.

with technology.

Increasingly artists are experimenting with technology not only in the enhanced expression of their ideas, but in the explorations of the implications of the technology itself. San Francisco's Mark Pauline, of the "Survival Research Labs" artists co-op, has helped create a notorious selection of sinister mechanized sculptures, kinetic art with a vindictive life of its own, which is a kind of dark counterpoint to Stelarc. Where Stelarc glories in the constructive and transcendent potential of high tech, Pauline depicts its nightmarish side with a sort of fetishistically-deliberate excess. Pauline has constructed fierce-looking dark machines which move like giant scorpions to smash at other machines with a spiked mace on a chain; which stalk one another with hammers and flame throwers and machine-guns firing pellets. They are strikingly martial stylizations contrived with the stripped-down elegance of automatic weapons, their parts of black metal sometimes fused with bone and bits of mummified animal, expressing a stomach-churning actualization of the interbreeding of organism and machine.

(SRL's vision of self-contained combat machinery may be uncomfortably close to reality, in some quarters. Even now, in Brazil, autonomous weapons are being tested; weapons that operate them-

selves, that drive themselves about, using cameras and computers to select targets. Weapons which, if we can believe their makers' claim, will be able to distinguish between Our Side and the enemy's.)

Stelarc canonizes technology; SRL burns it at the stake. Both ends of the spectrum of man's relationship to the New Reality are explored. As they should be. They're being explored outside SF, but at the very frontiers of SF concepts. They're providing science fiction alternatives that may be more satisfying, in the end, than science fiction itself.

Picture it: Stelarc at work, the artist hardwired to his sensory equipment, his control mechanisms, his fiber optic cables; enclosed in a cubistic womb of light that responds to his slightest twitches; the mechanical hand on his thigh moving with a life of its own but at the same time expressing the internal clock-work of the artist; light flashing from the eyes of this cyborgian pioneer, as he laser-caligraphs the air, scribbling a creature, a chimera grafted together of horror and grace, the synthesis of erstwhile humanity and tomorrow's humanity struggling to be born. ●

Next Issue, in Alternatives Part Two: The New Fantasy

John Shirley's massive Eclipse trilogy will be published in the fall by Warner Books. His novel A Splendid Chaos (a surreal tour de force) will be published in hardback by Franklin Watts in the spring of 1988.

THE SPEARHEAD OF COGNITION

You're a kid from some podunk burg in Alabama.

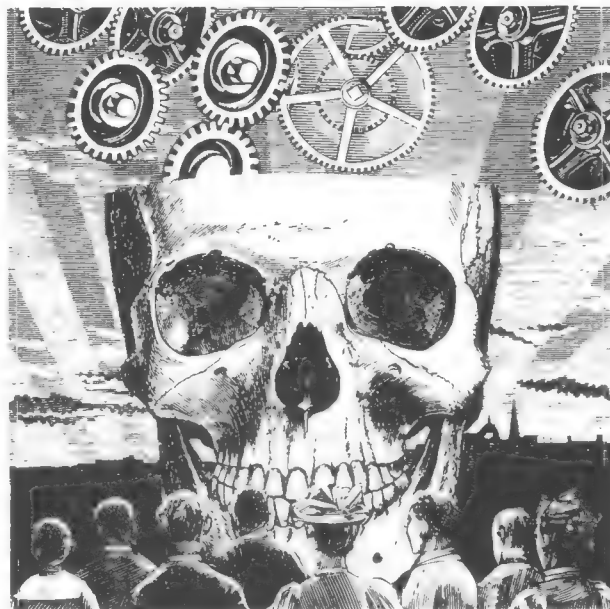
From childhood you've been gnawed by vague numinous sensations and a moody sense of your own potential, but you've never pinned it down.

Then one joyful day you discover the work of a couple of writers. They're pretty well-known (for foreigners), so their books are available even in your little town. Their names are "Tolstoy" and "Dostoevsky." Reading them, you realize: This is it! It's the sign you've been waiting for! This is your destiny—to become a *Russian Novelist!*

Fired with inspiration, you study the pair of 'em up and down, till you figure you've got a solid grasp of what they're up to. You hear they're pretty well-known back in Russia, but to your confident eye they don't seem like so much. (Luckily, thanks to some stunt of genetics, you happen to be a genius.) For you, following their outline seems simple enough—in a more sophisticated vein, of course, and for a modern audience. So you write a few such books, you publish 'em, and people adore them. The folks in 'Bama are fit to bust with pride, and say you've got Tolstoy beat all hollow.

Then, after years of steadily growing success, strange mail arrives. It's from Russia! They've been reading your stuff in translation, and you've been chosen to join the Soviet Writers' Union! Swell! you think. Of course, living in backwoods Alabama, it's been a little

CATSCAN



By Bruce Sterling

tough finding editions of contemporary Russian novelists. But heck, Tolstoy did his writing years ago! By now those Russians must be writing like nobody's business!

Then a shipment of modern Russian novels arrives, a scattering of various stuff that has managed to elude the redtape. You open 'em up and—ohmiGod! It's...it's COMMUNISM! All this stupid stereotyped garbage! About Red heroes ten feet tall, and sturdy peasants cheering about their tractors, and mothers giving sons to the Fatherland, and fathers giving sons to the Motherland... Swallowing bile, you pore through a few more at random—oh God, it's awful.

Then the *Literary Gazette* calls from Moscow, and asks if you'd like to make a few comments about the work of your new comrades. "Why sure!" you drawl helpfully. "It's clear as beer-piss that y'all have

gotten onto the wrong track entirely! This isn't literature—this is just a lot of repetitive agitprop crap, dictated by your stupid oppressive publishers! If Tolstoy was alive today, he'd kick your numb Marxist butts! All this lame bullshit about commie heroes storming Berlin and workers breaking production records—those are stupid power-fantasies that wouldn't fool a ten-year-old! You wanna know the true modern potential of Russian novels? Read some of my stuff, if you can do it without your lips moving! Then call me back."

And sure enough, they do call you back. But gosh—some of the hardliners in the Writers'

Union have gone and drummed you out of the regiment. Called you all

kinds of names...said you're stuck-up, a tool of capitalism, a no-talent running-dog egghead. After that, you go right on writing, even criticism, sometimes. Of course, after that you start to get MEAN.

This really happened.

Except that it wasn't Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. It was H.G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon. It wasn't Russian novels, it was science fiction, and the Writers' Union was really the SFWA. And Alabama was Poland.

And you were Stanislaw Lem.

Lem was surgically excised from the bosom of American SF back in 1976. Since then plenty of other writers have quit SFWA, but those flung out for the crime of being a commie rat-bastard have remained remarkably few. Lem, of course, has continued to garner widespread acclaim, much of it from hifalutin' mainstream critics who

would not be caught dead in a bookstore's skiffy section. Recently a collection of Lem's critical essays, *Macroworlds*, has appeared in paperback. For those of us not privy to the squabble these essays caused in the '70s, it makes some eye-opening reading.

Lem compares himself to Crusoe, stating (accurately) that he had to erect his entire structure of "science fiction" essentially from scratch. He did have the ancient shipwrecked hulls of Wells and Stapledon at hand, but he raided them for tools years ago. (We owe the collected essays to the beachcombing of his Man Friday, Austrian critic Franz Rottensteiner.)

These essays are the work of a lonely man. We can judge the fervor of Lem's attempt to reach out by a piece like "On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction:" a Pole, writing in German, to an Austrian, about French semantic theory. The mind reels. After this superhuman effort to communicate, you'd think the folks would cut Lem some slack—from pure human pity, if nothing else.

But Lem's ideology—both political and literary—is simply too threatening. The stuff Lem calls science fiction looks a bit like American SF—about the way a dolphin looks like a mosasaur. A certain amount of competitive gnawing and thrashing was inevitable. The water roiled ten years ago, and the judgement of evolution is still out. The smart money might be on Lem. The smarter money yet, on some judicious hybridization. In any case we would do well to try to understand him.

Lem shows little interest in "fiction" per se. He's interested in

science: the structure of the world. A brief autobiographical piece, "Reflections on My Life," makes it



clear that Lem has been this way from the beginning. The sparkplug of his literary career was not fiction, but his father's medical texts: to little Stanislaw, a magic world of skeletons and severed brains and colorful pickled guts. Lem's earliest "writings," in high school, were not "stories," but an elaborate series of imaginary forged documents: "certificates, passports, diplomas...coded proofs and cryptograms..."

For Lem, science fiction is a documented form of thought—experiment: a spearhead of cognition.

All else is secondary, and it is this singleness of aim that gives his work its driving power. This is truly 'a literature of ideas,' dismissing the heart as trivial, but piercing the skull like an ice-pick.

Given his predilections, Lem would probably never have written "people stories." But his rationale

for avoiding this is astounding. The mass slaughters during the Nazi occupation of Poland, Lem says, drove him to the literary depiction of humanity as a species. "Those days have pulverized and exploded all narrative conventions that had previously been used in literature. The unfathomable futility of human life under the sway of mass murder cannot be conveyed by literary techniques in which individuals or small groups of persons form the core of the narrative."

A horrifying statement, and one that people in happier countries would do well to ponder. The implications of this literary conviction are, of course, extreme. Lem's work is marked by unflinching extremities. He fights through ideas with all the

convulsive drive of a drowning man fighting for air. Story structure, plot, human values, characterization, dramatic tension, all are ruthlessly trudgeon-kicked aside.

In criticism, however, Lem has his breath, and can examine the trampled flotsam with a cynical eye. American SF, he says, is hopelessly compromised, because its narrative structure is trash: detective stories, pulp thrillers, fairy-tales, bastardized myths. Such outworn and kitschy devices are totally unsuited to the majestic scale of science fiction's natural thematics, and reduce it to the cheap tricks of a vaudeville conjurer.

Lem holds this in contempt, for he is not a man to find entertainment in sideshow magic. Stanislaw Lem is not a good-time guy. Oddly, for a science fiction writer, he seems to have very little interest in the intrinsically weird. He shows no

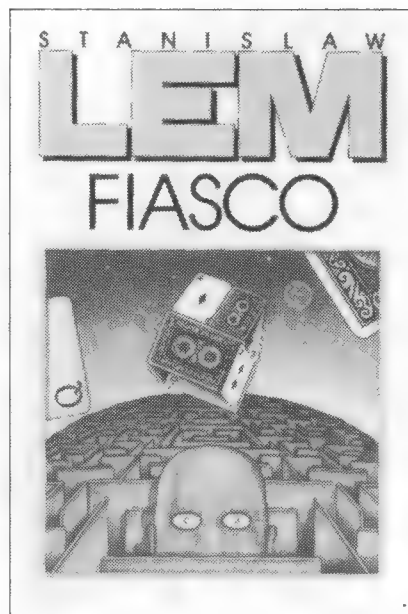
natural appetite for the arcane, the offbeat, the outre. He is colorblind to fantasy. This leads him to dismiss much of the work of Borges, for example. Lem claims that "Borges' best stories are constructed as tightly as mathematical proofs." This is a tautology of taste, for, to Lem, mathematical proofs are the conditions to which the "best" stories must necessarily aspire.

In a footnote to the Borges essay Lem makes the odd claim that "As soon as noboy assents to it, a philosophy becomes automatically fantastic literature." Lem's literature is philosophy; to veer from the path of reason for the sake of mere sensation is fraudulent.

American SF, therefore, is a tissue of frauds, and its practitioners fools at best, but mostly snake-oil salesmen. Lem's stern puritanism, however, leaves him at sea when it comes to the work of Philip K. Dick: "A Visionary Among the Charlatans." Lem's mind was clearly blown by reading Dick, and he struggles to find some underlying *weltanschauung* that would reduce Dick's ontological raving to a coherent floor-plan. It's a doomed effort, full of condescension and confusion, like a ballet-master analyzing James Brown.

Fiction is written to charm, to entertain, to enlighten, to convey cultural values, to analyze life and manners and morals and the nature of the human heart. The stuff Stanislaw Lem writes, however, is created to burn mental holes with pitiless coherent light. How can one do this and still produce a product resembling "literature?" Lem tried novels. Novels, alas, look odd without genuine characters in them. Then he hit on it: a stroke of genius.

The collections *A Perfect Vacuum* and *Imaginary Magnitudes* are Lem's masterworks. The first contains book reviews, the second,



introductions to various learned tomes. The "books" discussed or reviewed do not actually exist, and have archly humorous titles, like "Necrobes" by "Cezary Strzybysz." But here Lem has found literary structures—not "stories"—but assemblages of prose, familiar and comfortable to the reader.

Of course, it takes a certain aridity of taste to read a book composed of "introductions," traditionally a kind of flaky appetizer before the main course. But it's worth it for the author's sense of freedom, his manifest delight in finally ridding himself of that thorny fictive thicket that stands between him and his Grail. These are charming pieces, witty, ingenious, highly thought-provoking, utterly devoid of human interest. People will be reading these for decades to come. Not because they work as fiction, but because their form follows function with the sinister elegance of an automatic rifle.

Here Lem has finessed an irrevocable choice. It is a choice every science fiction writer faces. Is the

writer to write Real Novels which "only happen to be" science fiction—or create knobby and irreducible SF artifacts which are not true "stories," but visionary texts? The argument in favor of the first course is that Real Readers, i.e. mainstream ones, refuse to notice the nakedly science-fictional. How Lem must chuckle as he collects his lavish blurbs from *Time* and *Newsweek* (not to mention an income ranking as one of poor wretched Poland's best sources of foreign exchange). By disguising his work as the haute-lit exudations of a critic, he has out-conjured the Yankee conjurers, had his cake and eaten it publicly, in the hallowed pages of the *NY Review of Books*.

It's a good trick, hard to pull off, requiring ideas that burn so brilliantly that their glare is overwhelming. That ability alone is worthy of a certain writhing envy from the local Writers' Union. But it's still a trick, and the central question is still unresolved. What is "science fiction," anyway? And what's it there for? ●

Columnist Bruce Sterling, author of *Schismatrix*, *The Artificial Kid* and *Involution Ocean*, is the C-pnk Trotsky and editor of the *Mirrorshades* anthology. His most recent production, in collaboration with The Nancy Sterling, is entitled Amy Joyce.



THE 10 GREATEST SF NOVELS:
An exercise in revisionism
by Paul Di Filippo

Let's get a few things straight first.

1). For the purposes of this article—and really in all literary usage—SF should be taken to mean a narrative mode distinguished by certain shared tropes, concerns, conceits, and attitudes. SF does not apply solely to novels published under the rubric "science fiction," nor only to those works by brand-name authors. It is not a registered trademark of SFWA, nor of any fan organization. An SF novel does not have to be set offplanet or even "twenty minutes into the future." SF is an approach available to any writer who cares to employ it, just as is iambic pentameter.

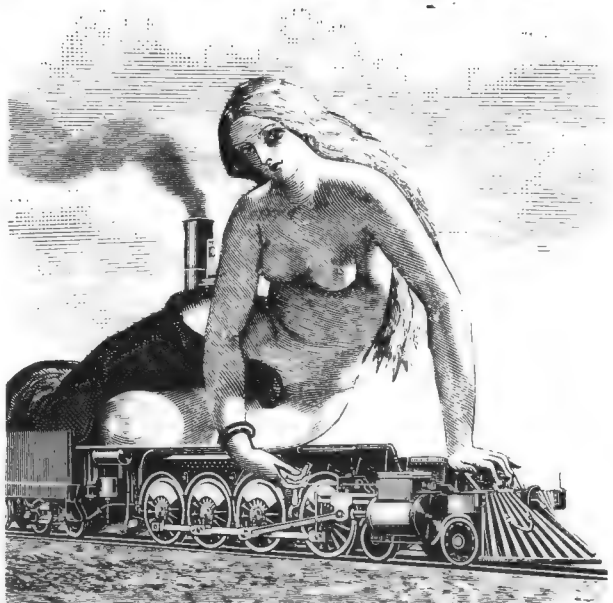
2). The term "greatest" is a superlative. It means "that than which there is none greater." It does not mean "pretty good in comparison with the rest of this crap," or "a little better than this particular author's usual lackadaisical efforts," or "suitable reading while trying to relieve constipation." "Greatest" is an adjective which implies that there are objective standards against which fiction can be measured.

What, then, are the marks of greatness? Greatness implies magnitude, imaginative brilliance. Greatness means knock-you-on-your-ass intentions and accomplishment. Greatness means grandeur and panache, sensitivity and subtlety; both fireworks and fireflies, orgasms and epiphanies. Great writers are Subcreators: they remake the universe in their own image. Writers who achieve greatness show a willingness to tackle the Big Questions. And that don't necessarily mean whether or not some friggin' Hula-Hoop world is gonna brush up against its sun.

A necessary but not sufficient hallmark of great writing is "passionate virtuosity," a term employed by the author John Barth.

It does not do the field—nor individual authors—any good to pretend that certain writers exhibit greatness when they obviously don't. Take the case of our four Superannuated Saints as an example: Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, and Heinlein. At various points in their careers, each of these men has done some fine writing. Enough, or of the proper caliber, to qualify them for greatness? It is my contention that in the end, they just don't measure up to the works cited below. It merely degrades the adjective—and simultaneously detracts from the legitimate accomplishments of these lesser authors—to call them

EYETRACKS



Reviews & Opinions

"great."

3). A novel is a lot of pages covered with words, at least some of the referents for which signifiers are not immediately traceable to "historical reality."

With these cavils and quibbles under our belt, let's get to the actual list. The reader should be advised that a novel's position on the list is tentative, subject to dislodgement by superior work. Like every reader, I have my blind spots. For instance, I have read nothing by Soyinka, this year's Nobel recipient, nor have I read *Ridley Walker* yet. These are only a couple of my lacunae. Still, after twenty years of deriving satisfaction from SF and puzzling about its nature, I feel I have a better idea than many of what constitutes true greatness.

One final hedge: if we can conceive of degrees of greatness, then below these masters, in the next forty spots, say, occur many familiar names—Sturgeon, Silverberg, Dick, et al—whom I do not wish to slight. However, they are simply not up there with these ten works listed below.

From bottom to top then, with some scattershot commentary:

10). *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess, (1962). Language as the true denominator of futurity and alienated alienness. A lovely allegorical structure underpinning an unsparing depiction of prole futility. Even more horrorshow than the flick.

9). *Empire of the Sun*, J.G. Ballard,

(1984). Of course the dustjacket lies when it claims this is "a total departure from the futuristic fiction that has secured his reputation." This is Ballard's perennial archetypal wandering hero in at the birth of the modern era, which, as we all know, is yesterday's SF.

8). *The Public Burning*, Robert Coover, (1977). These are not the Rosenbergs, and this is not Nixon getting buggered by Uncle Sam. No, it's merely the distilled essence of The American Century, a direct sequel to the Ballard entry above.

7). *Nova*, Samuel Delany, (1968). Is the collective memory of the readership so short that no one remembers this masterpiece, from which Gibson took half his concepts? Beats out *Dhalgren* cuz of sheer economy and clarity. When's the last time you stared at a Nova while jacked-in, Mack?

6). *Little, Big*, John Crowley, (1981). It takes place in the future, don't it? Too beautifully written and perfectly structured to omit.

5). *Giles Goat-Boy*, John Barth, (1966). Life on the Western Campus. When asked why he wrote such fat books, Barth replied: "I

always wanted to have a novel so big that its title could be printed across the spine instead of up and down." Talk about purity of motives...

4). *JR*, William Gaddis, (1975). The entire world economy is devastated by a sixth-grader and entropy localizes in a tenement apartment. Best opening line to date in our list: "—Money...? in a voice that rustled."

3). *Ada*, Vladimir Nabokov, (1969). "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike," says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel (*Anna Arkadievitch Karenina*)... Huh? Where the hell are we? This is only the first sentence, and we're lost. Turns out to be another timetrack, that's where, in a Russian-colonized North America where Van Veen is born, loves, loses, and ages. Is this possibly the past that led to the Russian-influenced *A Clockwork Orange*?

2). *Naked Lunch*, William Burroughs, (1959). The Grandfather Entry. This book is a motherlode of ideas, nuggets left raw that a lesser writer would have smelted and alloyed with tin. Does this sound like any recent novel to you? The Liquefaction program involves the eventual merging of everyone into One Man by a process of protoplasmic absorption. And besides, without *Naked Lunch*, we'd have no Steely Dan or *Interzone*.

1). *Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon, (1973). Rudy Rucker recently called

this "the quintessential cyberpunk masterpiece." It's all that and more. On one level an Explanation Of World History circa 1880-1945, it's also a meditation on the deathly beauty of technology, a Paranoid's Bible, and an entropic elegy. Have you worn your Imipolex G underwear today?

Are there any common denominators among these novels, which would allow us to generalize to some useful conclusions? Some are short, some very long, some of moderate length. The oldest was written almost thirty years ago, the newest only two. The authors are either British or American, but that might be a result of my ignorance.

However, aside from their all possessing the intangible but unmistakable qualities of greatness described earlier, they do share one feature. All either posit a world completely skewed from our familiar timeline (*Ada*, *Giles Goat-Boy*, *The Public Burning*), or stick to a past/present/near-future milieu. The one exception to this is *Nova*, which ventures very far into the future.

What explains this limitation of setting? Is it just that these mostly "mainstream" authors lack the true farflung imagination of the "real" SF authors, which trait allows the mind to roam to the ends of space and time? I don't think so. Each book on my list is, in its own way, as daring as anything by Stapledon. To explain this similarity, I would like to propose a theorem, which I call Di Filippo's Corollary to Clarke's Law ("Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."): "Any fiction employing sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from fantasy."

Now, fantasy is another narrative mode entirely from SF. True SF must somehow comment on the deep structures hidden within our twentieth-century existence. Fantasy does not do this. (What it does do is the topic for another essay.) Once these existing structures are ignored in favor of wild wish fulfillment, in whatever techno-guise, then a novel loses its shot at being great SF. *Nova* succeeds precisely because its politics and socio-economic structures are recognizable analogues and extensions of our contemporary ones. Thus, what appears to be the perhaps limited range of these ten novels is really a response to the need to be solidly anchored. But as *Nova* shows (and perhaps it deserves a higher ranking for so demonstrating), a great novel with a "traditional" SF setting can be written.

So then: if any writer wishes to displace someone from the list above, he or she must first look to achieving the "passionate virtuosity" exemplified by these ten works, and then make sure that the link to the present, however buried, remains intact.

Otherwise, it just ain't Great SF. ●

Paul Di Filippo's "Stone Lives" appears in the *Mirrorshades* anthology, but Bruce shoulda used "Skintwister."

RESPONSE TO THE HUMANIST MANIFESTO by Rob Hardin

"Criticism, insofar as it is not merely opining according to its tastes and humor—i.e., talking about itself while dreaming that it speaks of a literary work—criticism, insofar as it would pass judgement, consists in comparing what the author meant to do with what he actually did. While the value of a work lies in a singular and inconstant relation between that work and a reader, the proper and intrinsic merit of the author is a relation between himself and his design."

—Paul Valéry

John Kessel's impersonation of an apologist owes a great deal to Philip Larkin, just as his movement bears a suspicious resemblance to The Movement¹. Larkin's low-key response to the convolutions of Dylan Thomas. Unfortunately, Kessel's argument is not served by mimicry. There is no parallel between Thomas' aesthetic and that of Gibson: *Neuromancer* is not the work of an obscurantist. Thus, the "Humanist" position is hardly antipodal to the cyberpunk's, and Kessel shows himself to be more disgruntled by Gibson's popularity than he is dismayed by cyberpunk's stylistic excesses.

Because his position is tenuous, Kessel is unable to bring off Larkin's deflating tone. Unpretentious, self-mocking, Larkin's evaluation of Thomas was one of scale: that of a Corgi toy commenting ironically on some larger-than-life equestrian statue. Lamentably, Kessel's appraisal of Gibson is disingenuous and catty. Both men work the same side of the street, and Kessel seems all too aware of the fact.

The ideas of The Movement are not as fresh as they were four decades ago, nor can the writer for whom such ideas have become obsessions—the die-hard pamphleteer of a dated cause—risk sounding a little sour. Nevertheless, Kessel chooses to stress the urgency of his open letter by calling it a *manifesto*. I am puzzled by his choice of words. *Manifesto* seems an odd title for a piece which, though diluted with *New Yorker* editorial platitudes on Writing Well, is lugubrious with personal bitching. Because Kessel is really more interested in complaining about other writers than he is in the public declaration of his own motives or intentions, his title raises expectations that are not fulfilled. Even the tone of Kessel's title remains ambiguous: if, as in the final paragraph of his piece, the word *manifesto* is meant ironically, then the irony ought to have been made clear from the start. Perhaps Kessel should look up

¹ The Movement, as it is referred to here, was formed in the Forties. It consisted of reactionary Oxford undergraduates, and included Philip Larkin, Robert Conquest, Kingsley Amis and Thom Gunn. Not surprisingly, it no longer exists. Do not confuse it with The Movement of Bruce Sterling, et. al.

the meaning of the word before he uses it in print again.

Unoriginality, carelessness—these faults are not likely to win Kessel a second Nebula, but they do not demand critical castigation. His true and unpardonable sin is dishonesty. In his discussion of *Cheap Truth*, Kessel complains of cheap shots directed at his own writing. Fair enough: I want to look past Kessel's stage-whisper—his attempt to turn heads with a lowering of the voice—and address the slander beneath his style. I contend that there, too, cheap shots are to be found. He has aimed pretty low on some occasions, and on others has missed completely.

1) Kessel cites his grad school education as an example of something which cyberpunks might ridicule. As mere narcissism, (Kessel seems to enjoy dangling his diploma in front of the reader like a track medal) his statement is harmless enough; but as an assessment of cyberpunks, it is nasty and unfair. What uneducated writers can he be thinking of? Certainly not Gibson and Sterling, with their degrees in English and journalism, respectively.

2) Kessel claims to have found Vince Omniaveritas' writing *unintelligible*; only writing to Sterling enabled him to understand it. But Kessel's tone indicates that he was *offended* by the criticism: evidently, he understood it well enough. He doubtless wrote to Sterling in a state of indignation, not mystery, and now calls Vince's writing unintelligible in order to discredit it. This sleight-of-hand would be more appropriate in a witch trial than in the work of a self-professed Humanist.

3) Kessel dismisses the opening metaphor of *Neuromancer* as Donne-like, as if its resemblance to Donne were proof that Gibson's metaphor is derivative. But what of Kessel's famous diploma, and his legendary tenure as an English professor? Isn't he familiar with Ezra Pound's modernist dictum, "Make it new?" If Pound's paradigm of innovation, the *vers libre* of T.S. Eliot, had been shrugged off as "Donne-like" by his contemporaries, their failure to distinguish between metaphysical and modernist poetry would now seem breathtakingly wrong.

Kessel ought to have compared Gibson's opening metaphor to that of Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." There, the similarity is obvious: both compare the sky's occasional opacity with some disquietingly prosaic object. Both imply a criticism of modern life. Even so, if Kessel had failed to spot the differences between them, he might have reached the abysses of human ineptitude. Gibson's tone and diction have nothing in common with Eliot's. Then there is the question of context: Eliot's metaphor is a modernist artifact; Gibson's is post-modernist. Eliot is alienated—city life has left him depressed and horrified. Gibson, however, is entranced—he is fascinated with the detritus of pop culture. Eliot's form is fragmented, its bones broken by invisible ellipses; Gibson writes what mainstream critics have called

New Narrative: as he presents a landscape of pop-detritus, he reads it like a language, and his readings propel the story. He has found a way to write like Barthes and John Le Carré at the same time.

4) Kessel calls himself a "stylist" and Gibson a "conceptual" writer. Walter Miller, he tells us, is the patron saint of stylists, while Gibson and his kind are under the semi-literate sway of Alfred Bester. This is, of course, another cheap shot directed at Gibson, whose style is as eclectic as Lamb's library, and as painstakingly wrought as the calligraphy of Colard Mansion. The density of information in *Neuromancer*, the technetronic texture of its narrative is surely a stylistic feature rather than a "conceptual" one. Gibson's writing is defined by its close observation—its preoccupation with industrial minutiae recalls the glossy microcosms of super-realist Audrey Flack—and by its linguistic obsessions: computer language, the street, and the macaronic² argot of a global society. Thus, Gibson's concerns—elegance of description, and diction—are those of a stylist and not a "conceptualist."

Earlier in his "manifesto," Kessel repeatedly compares Gibson to Raymond Chandler. Does this make Chandler a stylist of a "conceptual" writer? Only Kessel, with his mystical method of categorization, can say for sure.

5) Kessel claims that *Neuromancer's* plot is cliché. Once again, Kessel is wrong. He has failed to notice the use of a peculiarly Twentieth Century device: the *pastiche*. If Gibson's novel is cliché, then so are the short stories of Barthelme, the films of Goddard, the music of Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

The modern pastiche subverts old forms and mannerisms in order to say something new. Often, it signals a return to certain virtues of an older style—virtues which the pastiche renders jarringly anticonservative by *deforming* them with modern stresses. Since that is exactly what *Neuromancer* does, Gibson's subversion of the conventional detective story is not cliché, it is avant-garde. Like *Closer*, by Dennis Cooper, and the recent short stories of Robert Gluck, *Neuromancer* is a reaction against the directionless meta-narrative of post-modernist fiction.

Gibson frequently cites Joseph Cornell as an influence. In a recent interview, he has compared his novels to Cornell's boxes. The parallel is obvious: Gibson's basic plot is Cornell's rectangle; his Dickensian flat characters mirror Cornell's matinee divas—those sirens of nostalgia, who are not realistic, but mythical—and his landscapes

of trash, which he is always decoding, are Cornell's iconography of junk, in which bits of garbage attain the significance of ideograms.

One feature of Gibson's writing which makes it avant-garde is its *simplicity*. While William Gass' novels are aimless and episodic, Gibson's are calculatedly spare: he has left his structure as clear and bare as a game of PacMan.

6) Kessel insists that his criticisms are meant to "help" Gibson as a writer. Here, Kessel has plunged to the depths of the reader's credulity. By encouraging critics to misunderstand *Neuromancer*, it would seem that Kessel intends to damn Gibson with faint praise—to demote him from innovative stylist to minor "conceptualist." In order to accomplish this, Kessel has had to systematically ignore the radical features of Gibson's methods: he is attempting to harm Gibson by implying that his originality is nothing new. Kessel is like the hostile music critic of the Twenties, who dismissed Stravinsky's neo-classical period as one of "ice-cream truck music" by refusing to notice that Stravinsky had *done something* to certain Haydn-esque conventions. I hope that the readers of *Neuromancer* will not be led to disregard their original perception of the novel because a charlatan feigns critical blindness. Ostensible incomprehension is not a proof of sincerity, it is the shell game of critics who imagine their own opinions to be above logical exposition.

Now that a number of mainstream critics have recognized the originality and elegance of Gibson's novels, and placed him alongside such New Narrative writers as Dennis Cooper and Mona Simpson, the readers of science fiction ought to be permitted to claim that which they were the first to recognize. A *Canticle For Liebowitz*, Mr. Kessel, is not the best that science fiction has to offer, nor is the approval of Walker Percy the most it can hope to attain. ●

Rob Hardin is a New York studio musician. We hope he can be prided from his keyboard for future critical speedballs.

THE FORGE OF GOD by Greg Bear
Tor, August 1987, \$17.95

GREAT SKY RIVER by Greg Benford
Bantam, December 1987, \$17.95

Two big books by two Greg B's. Both are being published in big expensive hardbacks, with their publishers' eager hopes of bestsellerdom stamped into every design wrinkle (or at least that statistical marketing bump that passes for "bestseller" in the SF field).

The first Greg, Bear, weighs in with the massively titled *The Forge of God*. Expectations are high for this one, as Bear is riding the momentum generated by his

searing *Blood Music* and the vast intricate clockwork of *Eon*. Both of those books demonstrated an extrapolative mind of stunning depth—Bear won't let an idea go until he has carried it several miles past the point where most SF writers would have relaxed and pulled the final page from their typewriter. Amazingly, Bear couples this talent with the ability to write clean, gripping prose. His fiction is suffused with what Stephen King calls the "gotta" (as in, "I'll be up in a few minutes, dear, I gotta finish this chapter"). *Forge* is certainly a "gotta" book. This reader read the sucker in a single bleary-eyed sitting. Unfortunately, Bear let the other half of his talent go a bit slack with this one.

The first three quarters of the book are excellent. It is a contemporary novel involving various alien manifestations in today's society that give conflicting signals. Are we to be welcomed into a benevolent Galactic brotherhood, or will the Earth be routinely dismantled for raw materials next month? Bear expertly and swiftly carries the narrative into and out of various levels of society, from a small town general store to the Oval Office. The whole planet gets stirred up over this: military clamp-downs, religious hysteria, etc. I had the impression that this was all the work of an automatic alien probe, a sort of hyper-sophisticated Voyager, that had assessed human culture, and was testing reactions to various types of stress. Imagine an giant anthill. You wreck part of it, and place a large food supply near another part. Then you sit back and watch the ants cope. This is a delicious idea, but, alas, one that turns out not to be the case.

The final quarter of the novel devolves into a standard end-of-the-world scenario, and the aliens' motives become transparent and obvious. It is true that Bear had a great time wrecking the planet. His scenes of the seams coming apart are more vivid and eloquent than any who have mined this vein before. But for me it was a conceptual copout that trivialized the book.

Great Sky River, by the other Greg B, Benford, is a more successful book. Benford postulates a far-future outpost on a distant planet. A fragment of humanity, a few hundred people, is on the run from an inimical and sophisticated mechanical civilization. Most of the novel is a harrowing hegira that has had our hardy band of nomads fleeing for decades before the book opens. Benford's scenes of pitched battles between electronically augmented people (who barely comprehend the technology that has been hardwired into their bodies) and various remarkably-designed killer robots are hard SF at its best.

As fun as the chase is, eventually the book winds to a close and something has to happen. There are showdowns with the mechs, ancient misunderstandings are cleared up, hidden motives are revealed.

Benford's book is less of a letdown than Bear's, but it all seems too pat. But it was a fascinating read.

²The term macaronic generally refers to any form of verse in which two or more languages are mingled together (OED). In this context, I have used macaronic to designate an artificial (i.e., literary) dialect which makes use of two or more languages. *Neuromancer's* street-slang is one example of the macaronic; the Russian/English of *A Clockwork Orange* is another.

A couple of semantic notes: Benford creates a new syntax for his characters who are communicating mostly via implanted radios. This works superbly. However, Benford also shows a distressing weakness for the Walter Jon Williams Syndrome. He jams two words together to make a new one too often. This makes his flashlight prose speedbump until the reader brain-burns. This has always been an irritating stylistic tic; it signifies laziness in the auctorial search for precision. spb ●

DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY By Douglas Adams
Simon & Schuster, 1987, \$14.95

Reviewed by Grant Oliphant

Douglas Adams is back, and the news is good, even if this is not the book that Adams addicts might expect.

In fact, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* is the sort of book any loyal reader fears—one in which a favored writer branches out, experiments with new forms, and leaves familiar characters behind. Adams, the author of the delightfully idiotic *Hitchhiker* trilogy, all four books, has poured his unique genius into an unlikely genre: detective fiction. Not to worry. While Adams respects certain tenets of good mystery writing, he confronts his characters with more than the conventional whodunit.

Dirk Gently is a shady seer whose latest career has been the tracking of missing cats through recognition of the "interconnectedness of all things." He is also an old school chum of the central character, Richards, who, shortly after dining at Cambridge with his absent-minded former tutor Reg, and discovering a horse in the professor's bathroom, is implicated in the murder of his girlfriend's brother. Thus he reluctantly joins the limited ranks of Dirk's clientele. Aside from the horse in the bathroom, a reasonably conventional set-up. Even the horse will make sense to the reader accustomed to an Adamsian universe, because the horse has already been introduced as the companion from another place and time of a malfunctioning Electric Monk (which is something like a programmable Californian.)

The Electric Monk is Adams' first clue, not so much as to who committed the crime, but to the parameters within which the solution might lie—simply, all of space and time. Fortunately for Richards, it is within that infinite framework that Dirk conducts his best, and apparently only, work.

As a mystery, this novel is Holmesian, in that Adams is privy to clues he does not share with his readers. But he is to be forgiven for that. *DGHDA* is the mystery writer's equivalent of three-dimensional chess. In expanding the universe of possibilities that detective fiction can offer, Adams has dealt yet another master stroke. ●

Grant Oliphant is a Washington-based writer, and the editor of *American Politics magazine*.



ALIEN FIRE

by Anthony Smith and Eric Vincent
Kitchen Sink Press, 1987, \$2.00

Imagine that you are part of a surviving civilization in the post-apocalypse heartland of America. The land is beginning to revive itself, but you still have a long hard fight in front of you before there are "amber waves of grain," once more. Then, when you least expect it, an alien scouting party pays you a visit and delivers hope in the form of fertile ears of corn whose DNA has been altered to adapt to the mutated environment.

Manna from heaven.

But what do these aliens want in return? Weapons? Living specimens of humanity? Your enslavement? Naw, none of that stuff. These aliens, the crew of *The Wooden Bird*, want jukeboxes, comic books, video tapes, records, Howdy Doody puppets, Hummel dolls, kimonos, old cereal boxes... They want anything that qualifies as an artifact of Earth's unique culture.

Imagine that and you'll have some grasp of just one of the many plotlines and interactions to be found in each issue of *Alien Fire*. As I write, there have been two issues published, and each is rich with the kind of detail and complexity that makes for great fiction. The fact that it is to be found in a comic book makes the reader stop and take notice and return to

the beginning to reread it all in the hope of gleaned missed information.

Alien Fire is the best science fiction comic published in this country. It is intelligently written and drawn with a precision that reminds me of classic SF illustrators like Edd Cartier and Ed Emsh. Artist Eric Vincent was trained to be a biological illustrator and the confidence he has in his artwork shows in every panel. Because of his background, his aliens have a studied and logical physiology—you get the impression that if they existed, they would be pretty weird if you ask me, they would be able to function in a realistic manner.

The writing is equally straightforward and well thought out. Having apparently spent a couple of years in preparation, writer Anthony Smith has worked a lot of the kinks and inconsistencies out of the script. The storyline is so dense that it will reportedly take the first six issues to set up all the characters and plots—after which I am sure it will take the comic medium out of sci fi and into science fiction.

This is a book that any lover of Bruce Sterling, Jack Vance or even Larry Niven will be able to appreciate. Some, like me, will cherish it. *Alien Fire* is probably over the heads of most of the comic buying public. What better recommendation do you need? ● djs

MINDPLAYERS by Pat Cadigan
Bantam, August 1987, \$3.50

One of the major elements of C-pnk architecture is the direct brain to computer link. In some of William Gibson's short stories (notably "The Winter Market") he played with the idea of brain to brain link via computer. But the brain is hardware (or "wetware," if Michael Swanwick will allow this usage of that slippery term—see letter column) and the mind is software. Gibson and his imitators have never really explored the mind to mind link.

But C-pnk doyenne Pat Cadigan has done just that in her first novel. Cadigan's coolly ironic short stories have been a quirky presence in the magazines for some time now. Her "Pretty Boy Crossover" was a Nebula nominee this year. *Mindplayers* is a continuation and extension of her cerebral thematics. It's a very mental book.

Alexandra Victoria Haas is arrested in the first chapter for illegal use of a mad-cap—a device for inducing psychosis. She is given several choices by the authorities,

and chooses to undergo training as a pathos-finder. The novel chronicles the training, and the field work following the training process.

Mindplayers defies description, as most of it takes place inside the minds of Haas and her friends and enemies. In fact, very little of the book occurs in what we inadequately term the "real" world. *Mindplayers* is disjointed and episodic in structure, something that I would consider a flaw in another book. But this one is compellingly fascinating throughout, structure be damned. Cadigan's explorations of mental symbology, and her characters' jousting on a myriad of planes of thought are fodder for a whole departmentful of psych grad students in search of research material.

I wish I could tell you a little more about the "plot" of this novel, but language fails me. Suffice to say that it is witty, inventive, and (as Bruce Sterling says in his flap quote) "more fun than a barrel of rabid Zen monkeys!" ● spb

LETTERS

(continued from page 4)

well. There was an incident in Wellington's Peninsular Campaign where the retreating enemy broached casks of brandy, letting it run into the streets, and the pursuing British infantry broke ranks to lap it up. And, of course, there is the testimony of Hogarth's "Gin Lane." Are we really so different except for the way we hype our vices?

Which brings us back to the cyberpunk movement. You look to see what's there, and we get a lot of rhetorical flourishes about the evils of capitalism and the intrusiveness of technology, but the real key is the "lower class protag." The only way you can motivate the poor son of a bitch to do anything is to chase him with hired thugs. Action masquerading as science. What don't you have? A state that inspires loyalty (surely the stuff of speculative fiction given what we see in the papers,) people dying for ideals, moral choices, the sort of stuff that the *ugh* humanists are concerned to write about.

Which in turn leads us around to the cyberprep "countermovement," which has been cited elsewhere as evidence of hostility to virile new writing and hard-edged new ideas by fuzzy-minded anti-technological types. I have been to several cyberprep parties, and have seen no sign of anybody attacking anything. Rather, we have a bunch of congenial people paying cyberpunk the respect it deserves. The cyberpunk works are left to stand on their own, as they all must, and the cyberpunk hype is given a gentle raspberry by the people it has pronounced *passé*.

Hostility? There may be a little. No author loves a bad review, even in a fanzine like *Cheap Truth*, and nobody likes to be consigned to the dustbin of history either. The cyberpunk hype has done a certain amount of tearing down others to make the movement stand taller, but I would suspect that any hostility is directed at individuals (hello there John Shirley) rather than at any so-called "literary movement."

And what about the movement? As Tallulah Bankhead said to the members of the Algonquin Roundtable (another clique of literary self-promoters): "There is less here than meets the eye."

Not to mention the subjugation of millions of Asians by the British, both economically and altered-consciously, with the powerful lever of opium.

PAT MURPHY

Apt #6 1325 Lincoln Way
San Francisco, Calif. 94122

I am grateful that Michael Swanwick, in his lunk-headed piece for *Asimov's*,

labeled me a "lone wolf" rather than lumping me into one of the rival camps. Since I've been categorized as a maverick anyway, I can sit on the sidelines and watch the warring groups throw spitwads at one another. But the whole thing is getting tedious.

It seems to me that there's a distressing tendency toward clubbiness at the heart of all this debate. It all reminds me of the old cartoons of kid's forts with scrawled signs: "Keep Out. Boys only. No Girlz allowed." The folks who put out *Cheap Truth* put up a sign that said: "Keep Out. Cyberpunks Only." (Times being what they are, "Boys Only" would have been politically unacceptable.) But "cyberpunk" is not only politically acceptable, but it is rather flexible—stretching to accommodate the people that the clubmembers wished to admit.

So the clubhouse was built, and the sign was painted. All that would have been fine, but then to make sure that the desirability of their position was fully recognized, the folks inside the clubhouse began lobbing eggs at the folks on the outside. The people who were designated as the rival club responded, not surprisingly, by screaming and storming the barricades. I'm sorry guys, but the whole thing seems a little ludicrous.

It puzzles me why people wish to expend such energy drawing lines and establishing barriers. It's a very human tendency, I grant you: most creation myths begin with the separation of the light from the dark, the heavens from the earth, the chosen people from the rest of you sinners, and so on. Unfortunately, the drawing of lines and the creation of categories encourages people to confuse the name and the thing. The category takes on a reality of its own and begins to dictate the thoughts you think, the actions you undertake. Establishing categories encourages people to take unfortunate shortcuts in their thinking: Scorpios always act like that; I'd never vote for him—he's a Republican; I don't read science fiction; I don't understand Modern Art; no woman is capable of driving a car, handling an executive job, or _____ (fill in the blank).

As any taxonomist can tell you, there is a certain arbitrariness to categories. The lines are not certain. Take, for example, the line that most people draw between art and science. Most people know without question that art and science have little in common. But that blind categorization ignores the very real similarities between the two endeavors. Both artists and scientists consider the world around them, try to make sense of it, and try to communicate that sense to others. Their approaches may differ, but there's a fundamental similarity between the two disciplines. I could easily make an argument

that a creative research scientist and a sculptor have more in common than the scientific researcher and the engineer who applies the result of his work. In the same way, I would say that the work of Bill Gibson and that of Kim Stanley Robinson have a good deal more in common than the work of either writer and Jerry Pournelle or David Brin.

Oh, sure, categories are very useful for some things. For years, people with time on their hands have been discussing where to draw the line between fantasy and science fiction. I never saw the point of the debate. I had a simple answer: if a story sells to a fantasy market, it's fantasy; if it sells to a science fiction market, it's science fiction. Why waste time and energy saying that this is one thing and this is another? Then an editor explained to me that fantasy and science fiction are quite handy marketing labels, allowing publishers to take advantage of categorization. The label need not dictate what you write, but it may determine who buys what you've written. And it's clear that cyberpunk is a damn fine marketing device. (If Chairman Bruce ever does decide to get an "honest job," I suggest he consider a position as a marketing consultant. He has an enviable flair for it.)

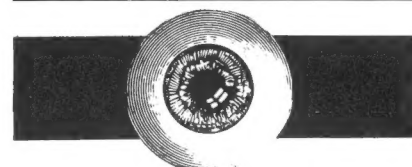
Sure, I draw lines: one separates people whose writing I like and people whose writing I dislike. But sometimes, I have to qualify that: people whose writing I like will occasionally write books I hate, or, more rarely, viceversa. And cyberpunks, humanists, and a hell of a lot of lone wolves fall into both categories.

Congratulations on a fine premier issue. I do hope that the debate about the C-word will soon grind to a halt. As a biologist, I always found taxonomy rather dull.

I divide readers into two groups: those who allow a book to affect them, one way or another, strictly on its own merits, and those who labor feverishly to jam the things into pre-structured cubby holes. Labels create cubby holes. This letter articulates the EYE philosophy far better than we could.

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